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THE Hudson Review

30th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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To Our Readers

For many years, we have used the asterisk in our *Notes on Contributors* column to indicate a writer's first appearance in THE HUDSON REVIEW. In this Thirtieth Anniversary issue, fifteen of a total of twenty-eight contributors are so designated, and of the fifteen, a large percentage are writers who have not been widely published anywhere. We have always considered the discovery of new writers to be one of our most important functions: we take pride in our record, and intend to continue performing this function in the future.

This issue is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, D.C., a Federal agency. We wish to express our appreciation.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be read from June 1–September 1, 1978.

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Notes on Contributors

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS, a former Advisory Editor of this Review, has recently published two books, *After Joyce* and *Bad Mouth*. In somewhat altered form, "What Was Modernism?" was read as the Faculty Research Lecture at the University of California.

A Professor of English at Wellesley College, PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS is working on a study of attitudes toward adolescence in different historical periods. Her most recent book is *Imagining a Self* (Harvard University Press).

G. THOMAS COUSER* is working on a book on American autobiography and teaches English at Connecticut College.

DINITIA SMITH*, a writer living in New York City, is completing a novel about the 1960's. "Magic" is her first fiction publication in a national magazine.

FRAWLEY BECKER* lives in Los Angeles where he writes, translates and works in films. He has a novel in progress, and "The Quality of Unmercy" is his second published short story.

DAVID IGNATOW'S* newest book of poems, entitled *Tread the Dark*, is being published by Atlantic Monthly Press.

Currently JEROME MAZZARO* is a Visiting Professor at San Diego State University, though he teaches regularly at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

MARILYN WANIEK's* first book of poems, *For the Body*, will be published this fall by Louisiana State University Press. She teaches English at St. Olaf College in Minnesota.

Recipient of a 1976–77 CAPS fellowship, JEANNE FOSTER HILL* is an instructor of Creative Writing at Buffalo State College.

PHILIP DACEY* has just completed a book-length sequence of poems based on the life of Gerard Manley Hopkins. He lives in Cottonwood, Minnesota.

PATRICIA SHEPPARD* is in her second year of law school at the University of Iowa.

LINDA PASTAN* lives in Potomac, Maryland, and her book of poems, *The Five Stages of Grief*, has recently been published by Norton.

JAMES REISS* commutes to work in Ohio by jet and recently won first prize in New York City's Big Apple Poetry Contest.

ROBERT PINSKY* teaches English at Wellesley College. His most recent book is *The Situation of Poetry* (Princeton University Press).

WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN, a regular contributor to this Review, teaches at Boston College.

ROBERT S. CLARK is the regular Music Critic of this Review.

JOHN SIMON has been writing on theatre for *The Hudson Review* since 1960.

MARCIA B. SIEGEL, *The Hudson Review*'s regular Dance Critic, teaches Dance Movement at Sarah Lawrence College and has recently been named dance critic of *New York* magazine.

CHARLES W. MILLARD is Chief Curator at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C.

DEAN FLOWER teaches English at Smith College.

MAUREEN HOWARD is a novelist, playwright and critic; her autobiographical work, entitled *Facts of Life*, will be published by Little, Brown this fall.

MARVIN MUDRICK has written for this Review for twenty-five years and is Provost of the College of Creative Studies and Professor of English at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

DENIS DONOGHUE, author of numerous books of criticism, is Professor of Modern English and American Literature at University College in Dublin, Ireland.

ROBERT McDOWELL lives in a California desert and teaches at Antelope Valley College.

(Continued on next page)

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JAMES FINN COTTER*, who teaches at Mt. St. Mary College in Newburgh, N.Y., is the author of *Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* and of articles on Chaucer, Sidney, Hopkins and Salinger.

RONALD VARNEY* is a freelance writer, now at work on a novel, who lives in Newport, Rhode Island.

FRANCIS FLAHERTY*, a recent Harvard graduate, is a freelance journalist with an interest in economic matters.

A resident of Lexington, Kentucky and a frequent contributor to *The Hudson Review*, GUY DAVENPORT is this year's Distinguished Professor at the University of Kentucky.

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Now as we celebrate our thirtieth anniversary of continuous publication, we would like to thank our readers, and to take this opportunity to learn more about each one of you. Won't you please tell us a little more about yourself in the short survey below? All answers are confidential and will be used only to form a general picture. As a token of our appreciation, we will send a gift copy of *The Hudson Review* to anyone you designate.

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   _____
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   _____yes _____no
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    _____none _____1–4
    _____5–10 _____more than 10
11. How many books do you purchase during one year?
    _____none _____1–4
    _____5–10 _____more than 10
    What kind of book do you usually buy?
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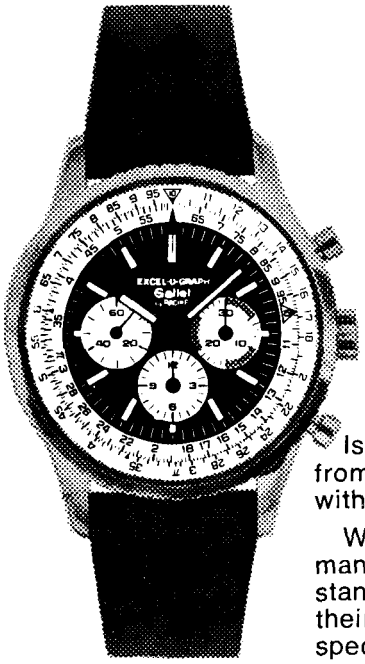

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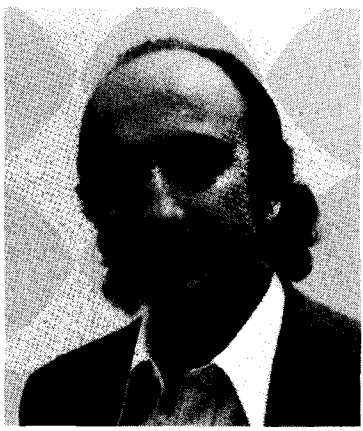

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

What Was Modernism?[1]

> "The past serves only as a means of knowing the present. But the present eludes me. *What, after all, is the present?*"
> —Henri Foçillon, quoted by George Kubler: *The Shape of Time*

SINCE THE IRONIC RESERVATIONS AND SELF-QUESTIONING CAUTIONS that surround the topic of "the modern" are potentially infinite, it's best to start with a blunt and vigorous citation from Mrs. Woolf, who tells us flatly that on or about December, 1910, human nature changed radically. I think she's right. Within five years either way of that date a great sequence of new and different works appeared in Western culture, striking the tonic chords of modernism. Ten years before that fulcrum of December, 1910, modernism is not yet; ten years after it is already. The "human nature" that changed is not the substructure and component systems of the animal, but his way of seeing himself as expressed in works of art, literature, music. Naming the great works that inaugurated this period, and thinking, however loosely, about their quality, may lead to the rudiments of a definition.

Specifically, then, Picasso began working on the "Demoiselles d'Avignon," that idyll of a Barcelona whorehouse, in 1906–07; Stravinsky's "Sacre du Printemps" had its riotous premiere in 1913. The first book by Ezra Pound to bear the title *Personae* came out in 1909; J. Alfred Prufrock made his debut (in Chicago, of all places) in 1915. In 1914, Joyce had just finished the *Portrait* and was turning his full attention to *Ulysses*. In 1914 Wyndham Lewis published *Tarr*. Roger Fry's Post-Impressionist show at the Grafton Galleries (November 1910 to January 1911) was followed in 1913 by the New York Armory show, which introduced Post-Impressionist art to America. D. H. Lawrence took his first steps as a poet and novelist in the years around 1910. From 1910 onwards, F. T. Marinetti was lecturing explosively around Europe on an ill-defined but violent

[1] It dramatizes a point made in the text that not even the title of this essay is "original." Harry Levin used it long before me in an essay reprinted in *Refractions* (Oxford University Press, 1966). Though my title is "pre-used," I hope not all my ideas are.

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esthetic program that he called "Futurism." It would gain adherents in France, England, and Russia, as well as Italy; the adherents soon faded or wandered, but the movement, despite Marinetti's frequent silliness, had wide repercussions. It was more than a sideshow.

This list could be extended to include names like Bartok, Braque, Musil, Modigliani, Epstein, Kafka, Klee, Kandinsky, and so on almost indefinitely, but already it has given us grounds to talk about modernism's concrete character. Doubtless there was some new spirit in the air, around December of 1910, and very likely it was connected with world-events like the miserable World War that was just around the corner or the unhappy Boer War that was just over the horizon. But these amorphous spirits in the air are very hard to pin down, and it's better to start by noting some specific things that modernism as a style was and wasn't. For example, Marinetti's futurism was loudly and explicitly hostile to the past as such: it wanted works of art as dynamic, efficient, and mechanical as automobiles or airplanes, and furiously repudiated all sorts of nineteenth-century historicism, humanitarianism, and softness. Except perhaps for the art of music, where it produced only a few laughable and sterile cacophonies, futurism had significant reverberations throughout the arts. Brancusi the sculptor was touched by this idea of stripped energy; so, more importantly, was Le Corbusier the architect; and if the movement didn't strongly influence Cubist painting, that was because the Cubists had already embarked on a very similar program of their own. Blok and Mayakovsky in Russia wrote Futurist poetry; Wyndham Lewis in the several issues of *Blast* and in his first novel *Tarr,* produced Vorticist prose which was closely allied to Futurist work in its bold discords, its stark and simplified syntax. Pound's version of Imagism is first cousin to Vorticism, and so in the same family group as Futurism; but here we run suddenly into confusion, because Pound, quite as much as his master Browning, was always fascinated by the past, and among his many styles wrote in a number of deliberately archaic forms and manners.

And this deliberate cultivation of the past seems, as we look around, rather more characteristic of modernism than the direct and violent assault mounted by the Futurists on what they delighted to call *passéisme.* Two root inspirations of Picasso's first and most famous Cubist painting, "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," were a big Paris exhibit of prehistoric Iberian sculpture and an equally

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comprehensive exhibit of primitive African masks. Stravinsky's "Sacre du Printemps" is based on and expressive of the vegetation rites and barbaric dances of ancient Russia. Both works were not only the last word in avant-garde style (for their day); they were more deeply rooted in primitivism than anything Europe had seen for a long time. And so with Eliot and Pound. They were "modern" poets from the beginning, and before long they were to be almost the touchstones of modernism; but all their work was deeply rooted in consciousness of the past. "The Waste Land" revolves around a priest-poet-prophet whose various incarnations include the Cumaean sybil and the ancient blind sexologist from Thebes, Tiresias. Pound's voyages in the *Cantos* took him through a series of events buried far in the past (the classical, the medieval, the Renaissance, the Chinese, the American past). One way or another, they all rhymed or were supposed to rhyme on events of the present; but the sheer volume of them made the *Cantos* look like an historical lumber-room. For Joyce, another of the great modernists, the Dublin episodes of June 16, 1904 were—among other things—but "a spume that played / Upon a ghostly paradigm of things." That paradigm was as old as any literary origin in the Western world; it was Homer's *Odyssey*. Far from repudiating and rejecting the past, as the Futurists demanded, modernism under one major aspect explored and exploited it.

The style of exploitation was new, the materials being exploited very old. The new primitivism sought a more remote past than people had been used to, and made very different applications of it. The polite, polished, Olympian side of the classic past was not what intrigued the modernists, rather it was the primitive, the barbaric, the mystery-side of the ancient world. Evidently they picked up a lot of these materials from the work of anthropologically-minded mythographers like Herr Max Muller, from the so-called "Cambridge anthropologists" led by Frazer, and from the work on archetypes done in the name of psychoanalysis by Jung and his followers—men like Ferenczi and Otto Rank. When Eliot went back to the Grail legend to structure his "Waste Land," he read it as something even more primitive than the medieval legend, he saw it as a vegetation ceremony out of prehistory. Prokofieff filled his "Scythian Suite" with barbaric clangor; the "Classical Symphony" is a twittering joke on Haydn.

What their materials were and where they got them were clearly less important than what the modernists did with them. The nine-

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teenth century had crammed itself on classical and medieval pastiches, where the modern poet or painter used myth as a familiar container into which to pour highminded contemporary sentiments. We don't need a better word for this sort of thing than "kitsch." Everyone can think of his favorite example—whether it's Bouguereau or Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, Lord Leighton or Robert Bridges, Bulwer-Lytton or Arnold Böcklin. But when Pound and Eliot, Stravinsky and Picasso took in hand the antique, they did so in a spirit at once deeper and more ironic than that of traditional neo-classicism. They used the past structurally, not for decorative ends; they incorporated fragments from the past in a structure stridently of the present; they emphasized grotesque disparities as much as harmonies; instead of a smooth surface, either antique or modern, they produced a broken one, which was both. Pound made Sextus Propertius talk of Wordsworth and frigidaires; Eliot's bowler-hatted, brolly-carrying clerk wandered the City streets anxiously inquiring about corpses buried in backyard gardens; Bloom put out the glaring eye of Cyclops by lighting a cigar instead of downing a John Jameson. Behind this change was a new sense of time as cyclical and repetitive, not sequential and developmental. The past wasn't a series of incremental stages on the road to the present, it was a single pattern replicated pointlessly and potentially to infinity. History became a series of all-but-identical arabesques traced on sheets of transparent plastic and lined up behind one another, so that only a slight shift of perspective could transpose any particular story into the Homeric age, the medieval era, the Renaissance, or the "present." Whatever its momentary embodiment, the configuration would always be much the same. A hard and jagged style of disparate elements juxtaposed without nexus or comment, an a-chronological patterning of correspondent themes (like a shape in space, not a sequence in time), these were techniques that admirably suited the translucent vision. This was the first major distinctive style of modernism, and not even one whose first interest is letters can fail to notice how closely it corresponded with the fractured surfaces of cubism, the broken, syncopated rhythms of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, the montage method of the movies.

The Futurist element of modernism was not only (by contrast with what preceded it) abstract and non-representational, perhaps in line with Worringer's thesis that abstract art represents fear, rather than acceptance, of the exterior world: it was, to borrow a

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word from José Ortega y Gasset, increasingly "dehumanized." The marks of this quality are everywhere, and one needn't labor the point. Fictional heroes, for example, could no longer be interesting because they embodied or exemplified "human nature": they were verbal patterns at second, third, or 26th hand, and they advertised the fact, as in Giraudoux's thirty-eighth retelling of the Amphitryon story. They were passive as beanbags, and they were also transparent—passive as in Kafka, transparent as in Gide. Bloom, by the end of the book which is so largely his, has been flattened as thin as a piece of strudel-dough; he is Everyman and Noman, a mountain-range, a heavenly body wandering beyond all astronomical waifs and strays, to the extreme boundary of space, and then returning, not once, but again and again, forever, in eternity, as best our imagination can reach that term. And Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker in the next and greatest book is explicitly described as a "human pest cycling (pist !) and recycling (past !) about the sledgy streets, here he was (pust !) again." "The Waste Land" has often been described as a miniaturized epic, and so it is; what's been left out is simply the epic hero and his story. Finally, one doesn't find much of the human form divine in Arp or Mondrian or in the Cubist works from which they derive. Modern painting, the greater part of it, doesn't represent human beings or the nature they inhabit; in fact, it doesn't generally represent at all. "Black on Black" or "Untitled No. 6" are characteristic labels, and they conjure up before us pictures on whose merits we may not agree, but which certainly don't have much use for the greasy commonplaces of flesh and blood.

Yet there was from the beginning an exception to modernism's dehumanization; and that was the ancient, inescapable commonplace of sex. Not love, not by any manner of means: not love in the reconciling and humane sense familiar to novel-readers and occasionally to people—nor yet the doomed passion of Wagnerian lovers, though one can't fail to note the remarkable survival-value of *Liebestod* as a literary theme. Maeterlinck and D'Annunzio were replicating it well into the new century; even Proust can be seen in this line, and so can our late contemporary Nabokov, for whom the grand consuming passion was still possible. Yet in most modernist documents it's sex, not love, that predominates. Sexual pathology was an important ingredient of both *Ulysses* and "The Waste Land"; the hero of consciousness was also a hero of inhibition, and the so-called stream of consciousness flowed to most interesting

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effect when it was turbid or even choked. After Joyce the medium of that stream was assumed to be sex, one major interest lay in its failure or frustration, and we can see the theme being used by Hemingway, Faulkner, and lesser imitators beyond number. Even when the symptom of his condition was called alcoholism, writer's block, or what Auden named "the liar's quinsy," the afflicted hero was characteristic, and his disease involved sterility or impotence.

Complementary, not contradictory, is the kind of therapy accomplished by the priapic heroes of D. H. Lawrence, who find a cure for the brittle, mechanical superficiality of modern life, not merely in sex, but in the dark, primitive impulses of the blood. Sex, for Lawrence, is a kind of cognition, a necessary filling out of the human form and figure. The work of literary art that embodies his feeling throbs with the rhythms and repetitions, the enthusiastic vocabulary of sensuality. Whether sex can convincingly sustain all the psychic burdens that Lawrence and the Lawrentians loaded on that wholly delightful activity may discreetly be doubted. In effect, Lawrence, Miller, and Durrell made a religion of the genitalia to replace other religions (including that of art), which had apparently lost their stimulating effect. The point isn't that the religion of sex amounted to a big operation; as a piece of social pathology, indeed, the less it amounted to, the more significant it is.

For this variety of sex-and-sensuality modernism grows out of the "dehumanization" view of modern art, even while protesting as vigorously as possible against it. Because modern society seems to consist of cutouts and robots going through predetermined mechanical routines, Lawrence proposes that we get under the hard carapace to a vital and tender existence that's available to us all in the life of the instincts, the dark river of the subconscious. And here he chimes on the thought of that very different and apparently much more crustacean man, James Joyce. For Joyce too, there's a vital giant buried within each of us; that's why his title includes as one of its many potentials an imperative—Finnegans, wake up! Within each of us a giant Finn lies buried under mountains of psychic detritus, cultural habit, social conditioning, acquired guilt. As we accept this load, we sleep or die; but if we throw it off, we can be reborn to the life that has always been there inside us. What Joyce and Lawrence, from rather different perspectives, join in seeing as the great enslaver, the brutal jailer of the human animal, is the conscious, rational mind. Even Stephen Dedalus knows this much before the end of *Ulysses*: "In here it is," he says, tapping his

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forehead and echoing Blake, "in here it is I must kill the priest and the king."

As one might anticipate, this anti-intellectualism isn't a simple phenomenon, and it hasn't yet found its historian or even its analyst. Quite obviously the trend owes something to those giant enemies of ideology, Marx and Freud; just as obviously, it includes elements deriving from neither, including an amorphous kind of culture-weariness and nostalgia for barbaric vitality that became very prevalent in the nineties of the last century and continued into this. The Futurists, with their fondness for fistfights and nonsense-syllables chanted at the top of their lungs, manifested this mood as well as anyone. Whether rationally or not, the weight of war, empire, and technology (all of which the Futurists in fact welcomed), the pressures of mass civilization, the exhaustion of religions, and the accumulated inhibitions of artistic artifice, all got mixed together in some minds as hostile to instinctual being. The mood was more anti-civilization than actively primitivist. Somebody like D'Annunzio, who stood up to his knees in esthetic decadence, yet promoted the swashbuckling, blood-and-iron side of fascism, spans much of the gamut. But there are ultra-violet bands beyond D'Annunzio, where hostility to the mind and its works spreads into hostility toward esthetic elitism and the category of art, hostility toward the mental reservation and bad faith implicit in artistic arrangement, hostility toward the very codes of equivalence which constrain our ultimate yawping, fecal Yahoo-sincerity.

But here we pause on the shore of a wide sea of modern irrationalist, anti-rationalist, and absurdist movements to note a couple of curious, half-way phenomena among some of the modernists. There's been a lot of talk about the fact that men like Pound and Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Céline, and Lawrence all had a special weakness, more or less overt, for authoritarian if not fascist governments. This needn't be put down to irrationalism as such. In some cases at least, these men had an abiding devotion to what they called rationalism, which they thought required an authoritarian and elitist group to embody and defend it. "Reason" in these cases isn't like a quiet room that you can walk into or out of; it's an area that men fight to control, from which you can be dispossessed despite your best intentions. Céline and Lawrence really lived some part of the time in a deliberately cultivated delirium; not so, or at least not so completely, Eliot and Wyndham Lewis. A key document for some of the early modernists, those whom Mr. Kermode

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slyly calls palaeo-modernists, was Julien Benda's *Trahison des clercs*. For all that it included a broad streak of anti-intellectualism, modernism was in many respects a learned, a clerkly phenomenon. And this isn't altogether an absurd concatenation: who, after all, has a better right to be anti-intellectual than a clerk?

A related ambiguity of literary modernism that hasn't been much explored is its attitude toward "surfaces," which has amounted to calling into question what we mean by that strangely elusive word. Works that consist of a series of receding congruent outlines obviously don't have any fixed, primary surface; they are deliberately polysemous literature, to be experienced now at this level, now at that, or at all at once, according to the reader's elasticity of mind. Relatively familiar is the trick with literary surfaces that involves fragmenting them and inviting the reader to construct constellations of significant shape across the vacant gaps between them—a kind of structure that defines the strongest areas of work's surface as those where nothing is expressed. Many modernist works destroy trust in a specious surface by filling it with deliberate anomalies and absurdities; or they modulate the narration of an ostensible event into another mode, possibly the tale of the narrative's own generation; or they work into the texture of an ostensible narration subliminal patterns of correspondence that can be seen (by a retrospective rearrangement) to constitute a counter-narration. Still more frequent is the use of unreliable (absurd or contradictory) and therefore unsettling narrators, from whose faltering indications the reader must construct whatever consecutive and coherent shape he can. One of the easiest ways to define a façade as "genuine" is to take another façade away from in front of it; given an antagonist relation, one can play off a fake into a double-fake just as easily as into a counter-fake. All these tricks with surface (and many more in common use) imply an equivocal attitude, at best, toward the reader and his impulse to "understand." In effect, the artist works with and against the reader's logical inertia. What we mean by understanding is simply identifying on some level a surface sustained and consistent enough to support a general idea that has formed in our minds. And modernist works from Pirandello to Beckett are concerned to delay, confuse, and impede, as much as to assist, the reader's definition of such an appropriate surface.

Game-playing is fun, but a very crude consideration of raw materials may tell us more about the real character of modernism.

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In architecture, it's particularly clear that modernism brought to the fore new materials used in distinctive new ways, just as the Futurists had proposed. Plate glass, stainless steel, reinforced concrete, even erector-set framing techniques, all came into prominence pretty abruptly, and with results ranging from Taliessin West at one end of the scale to the typical ungainly, shamefaced academic box at the other. In music, modernism brought about increased use, not only of discords and syncopation (particularly as the old distinction between "high" and "low" art faded toward insignificance), but of actual noise as a musical element. When Honneger imitated a locomotive, and Antheil mounted an airplane engine on the concert platform, we were well on our way to John Cage's famous "Four Minutes and Thirty Three Seconds," where random noise is not only incorporated in the performance, but constitutes the whole thing. For painting and sculpture the case is even more apparent. The first effect of modernism was to widen the palette and increase enormously the range of materials that the artist could use. The revival of collage and the importation into painting of sand, cigarette butts, linoleum, hair, straw, mud, or anything else that came to hand—this development is as familiar from jokes as from actual experience. Whatever could be seen in an esthetic way was potentially a work of art. And finally, I think the same sort of thing happened in the verbal arts as well: the range of literary language widened extraordinarily. I'm not thinking simply of the dirty words which crept in modestly with *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* expanded through Henry Miller's trilogy, and became a kind of buried speech-norm in *Last Exit to Brooklyn.* More interesting than this change is the increasing use for literary purposes of contaminated language—clichés and quotations, formulas and phrases out of the linguistic garbage-midden, sufficient to make up an independent, semi-private language of its own.

Radical linguistic innovation naturally came as a particular shock in a country like France, where the standards of literary correctness had long been strict. Anatole France, whose terminal date is 1924, refused to learn any foreign tongue, lest he corrupt the purity of his French idiom; but on the same principle, he might well have refused to learn French itself, since the way Frenchmen really talk is a couple of light-years away from the style in which Anatole France prided himself on writing. When Céline and Vian began writing French of the sort that the truck-driver and the scow-skipper use, they created real shock-waves. Americans and English-

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men had to do more than that to ripple the pond, but in fact they widened enormously, not just the vocabulary, but the general verbal resources of the tongue. To cast a novel in the form of an index or a catechism, to investigate the resources of absolute asininity or even idiocy, to cross-breed English with a dozen other tongues, to represent complex synthetic states of mind and the full multiplicity of our emotional subcurrents—all this involved a kind of verbal explosion, to parallel which we have to reach back to the age of Shakespeare and Montaigne. Explosions aren't, to be sure, necessarily great literary events in themselves: classical French drama emerged when the French vocabulary was contracting, not expanding, and is all the better for that. Still, the age of palaeo-modernism was one of expansion, invention, updating, radical refurbishing—down to the roots of the vocabulary. Following an age of avowed decadence, and often describing itself (maybe a bit wishfully) as an age of retrenchment and restraint, the palaeo-modernist era was in fact one of explosive and revolutionary change. Indeed, the difference between palaeo-modernism and neo-modernism may prove in the end too great to be bridged by a couple of half-comic prefixes. Maybe palaeo-modernism will prove to have been the only real modernism, while what succeeded it will prove to have been merely (and momentarily) contemporary.

At any rate, if modernism represented a change at all, that change was worked by palaeo-modernism; and from a short perspective at least, it seems real enough. One odd if forceful proof of its reality is that we've so far been unable to write a coherent history of modern English literature. The old survey-title took us, one writer after another, in decent chronological order, from *Beowulf* to Thomas Hardy; and there's a clear line to be traced there. But to get from Hardy to Eliot we have to go back to Laforgue and Donne. To reach Pound we must consult Lao Tze and Peire Vidal: and in order to get a background for Joyce we have to combine Swift, Flaubert, and Ibsen with a dash of Dante. In cosmic terms, nothing is new under the sun; but modernism gives us a sense of an entire cultural heritage being ploughed up and turned over.

It's much easier, however, to say where and how modernism started than where it ended, or if it has: the central and hardest problem is always the closest, the problem of *now*. We seem neither to have pushed beyond the innovations of modernism nor to have rejected them decisively. Primitivism no longer seems like a spacious new dimension of art, sex as a theme offers no larger per-

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spectives than leit-motifs and montage as techniques. A lot of play continues to be made with varieties of illusionism, including the manipulation and disintegration of surfaces: in that sense and perhaps a few others, modernism can be thought of as pushing forward, though its heroic days are certainly over.

Whether we need a new term for the period that has succeeded modernism depends in fact on where we imagine ourselves to be standing—a *locus standi* being exactly what's hardest to achieve in considering the *now*. On the customary loose accounting the middle ages lasted for a thousand gigantic years after the death of Boethius, from 500 to 1500. If we take a perspective anything like that long, the entire subject of modernism disappears from view. What happened in 1910 wasn't a new definition of human nature, and modernism never happened. It was just a tertiary wrinkle or ripple in a movement loosely labelled romanticism that began around 1750 or so. If we think of ourselves as still working through romanticism (protesting against it like all the other romantics before us), then we only have to go back a few years before romanticism to get to the renaissance, of which romanticism as a whole can very well be seen as a stage. Then we have three handsome periods in the history of the west—the classical age (800 B.C. to 500 A.D.), the middle ages (500–1500), and the renaissance, which, as it began about 1500, can reasonably be expected to peter out about 2500, give or take a couple of centuries. At that time we may be ready for the new Dark Ages, of which some romantic pessimists already profess to see multiplying signs.

Should I be sent on a Fulbright to some remote galaxy, this or something like this might be a good first perspective on the history of western culture. It's neat, it's symmetrical, and it divides the subject into three parts, which is always reassuring. For us, however, being who, where, and when we are, it has the slight disadvantage of being altogether useless. All these distinctions of schools and movements over the last century or two are doubtless trivial in the long run—if you run long enough. Futurist and modernist, symbolist and Parnassian, pre-Raphaelite and surrealist, expressionist and impressionist, realist and naturalist and so forth and so on—no doubt they will all iron out with the passage of time, and schoolchildren will be taught exquisitely simple generalities about the first machine age (1750–2400) or something like that. But if only for mnemonic purposes (and I'm sceptical enough to think those the only real purposes of cultural categories), we do

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need some scale calculated for the here and now, not for hypothetical inhabitants of Sirius and Betelgeuse.

So modernism we've got, its waves and reverberations have filled our lives, ephemeral as they are, and at the moment, though they've been damped, flattened, attenuated and subjected to frequent counterpressure, I see no sign that they've been supplanted by any other major unit of cultural energy. That, after all, is the only conclusive event that can write "finis" to a cultural era—the arrival, in thunder, of a new cultural era. I haven't heard any rumors of such an event. It would seem that, like ancient geographers, we have here a blank spot on our cultural map, to be filled with amorphous, nondescript creatures. Yet if we can't specify any cultural earthshakers over the past fifty years (since palaeo-modernism started fading into eclectic, harlequin neo-modernism), we may still remark some characteristic strains and pressures of what we may yet someday call "the age of undertow."

For one thing, where modernism has simply pushed ahead, it has exaggerated tendencies which were in it from the beginning, by making symptomatic jokes out of them. Hostility to artifice continues to make itself felt, along with violent dislike of that placatory packaging which makes art as easy to take as placebo pills. Art-forms that consist of holes and trenches dug in the desert, or a twenty-mile canvas fence to the sea, are a way of thumbing one's nose at 59th street and Madison Avenue. One young man has distinguished himself as an arranger of excelsior in piles—the admirer is challenged, as it were, to buy *that,* take it home, and put it in his living room. Akin to this impulse is another which disclaims, so far as possible, any participation of the artist in the arrangement of his materials. Minimalist art and aleatory art (which introduce a deliberate element but undeliberate quantity of disorder and chaos into the art work) are ways of repudiating the artist's role of God over his own creation. One can see this as a natural development from pop art, which deliberately accepted the forms of vulgar life, resizing them or reduplicating them, but often doing as little to them as possible. Andy Warhol, tired of imitating Brillo boxes, soon began acquiring real Brillo boxes, signing his name to them, and sending them to the galleries. Robert Rauschenberg, finding to hand a drawing by De Kooning, erased it, signed the paper, and listed it among his works as an "Erased De Kooning" by Rauschenberg.

Simultaneously, books are being written which consist entirely of

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the love-hate romance of the story with the story-teller—in which every ostensible story collapses into the story of the story-teller, and no surface exists which is not potentially and ultimately a phantom of his mind. The self-conscious novel is the mirror image, as it were, of minimalist art: in the one, the artist is nowhere, in the other he is everywhere. And both varieties of elusive game-playing (pretending as they do to delude us on a point where common sense is not to be deluded) bespeak a kind of radical tension between the craftsman and his craft. I think this tension could be traced widely, through Beckett's explicit efforts to murder prose fiction, through parodists and self-parodists, through joky nihilists beyond number. And there seem perfectly sufficient reasons for this state of affairs. By and large, our artistic forms do have long histories: they are mature forms. Yet the pressure on artists to produce something new is unremitting. The new mass audiences with their new leisure time gulp cultural artifacts at a staggering rate. To take a single instance, movies and television, though simply extensions of the drama, have multiplied a thousandfold the appetite for narrative, and so hastened a thousandfold the wearing-out of dramatic and narrative clichés. Even before the contemporary deluge broke, the pressures of mass society were creating in a few a nostalgia for the void, a fascination with the dark unknown, and thus a hatred of culture and its forms. By now, one of the few formulas for artistic distinction seems to be the repudiation of artistic distinction as a category.

And when even this extreme position has become hackneyed, where do we go? We fracture, we eclect. Some fall back, declining the gambit entirely; a few push ahead faster and faster. In recent painting particularly, phases and stages and fads and manners seem to succeed one another so fast, that even the competitors are hard put to keep up. I don't think it's just an illusion that artistic periods not only get shorter as we approach the modern era, but cultural classifications get continually hazier and looser. History is moving faster; eclecticism offers us ever-wider fields of choice for parody, pastiche, or imitation; the big alternatives have already been used. So categories multiply as the reasons for having them languish. Of all the empty and meaningless categories, hardly any is inherently as empty and meaningless as "the modern." Like "youth," it is a self-destroying concept; unlike "youth," it has a million and one potential meanings. Nothing is so dated as yesterday's modern, and nothing, however dated in itself, fails to qualify

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as "modern" so long as it enjoys the exquisite privilege of having been created yesterday. Collections of so-called modern art thus fall between two stools: I've walked through some that seemed to me absolutely petrified—as dead as a collection of dodo-skeletons—and through others that were so determined to be up-to-the-minute, that they were simply trendy. What's new isn't to be defined just chronologically. A lot of work pretending to be new is the old stuff covered with a glossy varnish of artificial novelty; a lot of innovation proceeds lockstep down the corridors of prescribed nonconformist conformity; and a lot of apparent novelty is new simply because previous workers in the vineyard had enough sense to see that that particular path wasn't worth following. Separating what's really modern from what's simply contemporary is an exacting speculation, and language doesn't help with the distinction. More than anywhere else in criticism, we need a rich if not indeed a rational vocabulary to discuss our own times: though we're poor everywhere, we're poorest of all here.

In one sense, then, we can say that the "modernist" period has never ended and never will end, though as a perceptible piece of time it has ceased to exist. If "modern" means no more than "born yesterday," the modern age won't cease till there are no more todays. So modernism will never end, it will just attenuate and diffuse itself more and more. In *The Shape of Time,* George Kubler says, neatly, "Every new form limits the succeeding innovations in the same series. Every such form is itself one of a finite number of possibilities open in any temporal situation. Hence every innovation reduces the duration of its class" (p. 54). This is true, and very sharply put, but it presupposes a clearly defined class. If your class is infinitely elastic, as "modernism" may become if we don't tack it down here and there, it may well achieve total comprehensiveness at the cost of total meaninglessness.

According to some of my colleagues, we are already into the postmodernist age—a formula that flatters one with the sense of being an amazingly up-to-date fellow, but also implies an awful degree of terminological desperation. Doesn't the heedless fellow who dreamed up this formula anticipate the day when we'll have worked our way into forms like post-post-post-modernist and its inevitable, infinite sequels? The more such patches one sticks on "modernist," the more obvious its inadequacy as a descriptive term in the first place.

So in answer to the question of my title, "What was modern-

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ism?" I'd like to propose a pretty restrictive response. Modernism was an inaccurate and misleading term, applied to a cultural trend most clearly discernible between 1905 and 1925. When it is understood to refer to distinct structural features that some artistic works of this period have in common, it has a real meaning, though it still isn't a very good term. As it departs from that specific meaning, it gets fuzzier and fuzzier, and sometimes it doesn't mean much of anything at all. Still, it has been a prevalent and widely accepted stopgap term, with a loose, emotive tone, and one of the ways to get better terminology is to pick it apart, and see how many different things it has been used to cover. Then perhaps we can get better names for them.

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PATRICIA MEYER SPACKS

Us or Them

ACCORDING TO THE DOMINANT CULTURAL MYTH of Victorian England, society depended on the family: strong father, noble mother, happy children. The existence of *un*happy children outraged such writers as Dickens partly because of the prevalent assumption that childhood should be a state of bliss. Philippe Ariès, suggesting that to every period of history there corresponds "a privileged age and a particular division of human life," argues that in the nineteenth century the crucial age was childhood, in the twentieth, adolescence. But the nineteenth century too contained its adolescents. How did the Victorians respond to that anomalous time between the virtuous childhood of natural innocence and the virtuous adulthood of moral achievement? To investigate this question involves social and psychological perplexities which reveal how much more complicated our ancestors were than their clichés about themselves might lead us to believe.

More than a century ago, in *The Cornhill Magazine,* an English father, a widower, reflected on the recent marriage of his twenty-year-old daughter. His tone veering from sentimentality to strained irony, he allows himself occasional outbursts of slightly-disguised rage at "this tyranny of youth! The world is all for it—all joys but money-getting are for young men and maidens. Beauty, poetry, love, day-dreaming—how absurd are we to talk of what they alone understand, and which is theirs only!" The young couple, the anonymous writer complains, eagerly embark upon their new stage of life, without realizing that they push Papa to a new stage as well: "his *last.*" Such an open acknowledgement of the real issues between the middle-aged and their successors—young people have all the fun, and, far worse, they outlive us—was almost as rare in 1862 as it is today. More typically, then as now, commentators concealed a profound fear behind a more superficial one, or demonstrated an emotional identification with the young which obscures the fundamental fact of their inexorable succession.

The real fears and fantasies of the decorous Victorians emerge, however, from just beneath the surface not only in avowedly "imaginative" literature but in moral tracts, sermons, serious journalism.

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The moralists sound always authoritative, yet reveal emotional uncertainty by their very blustering. Victorians made room for adolescence, recent social historians have explained, for clear economic and social reasons. Society, fearing the radical impulses of the young, as manifested, for example, in the Chartist movement, wished to segregate them from adult life; new ideas about individual freedom, encouraging youthful romanticism, began to flourish in the late eighteenth century as capitalistic morality triumphed; overcrowding in English professions by the third decade of the nineteenth century justified the lengthening of the educational process which kept middle-class young people from full parity. Such theories may help account for what happened; they do not explain the complexities of feeling which emerge as novels and essays consider the uncomfortable relation between youth, the time of self-exploration, and adulthood with its commitment to marriage and family.

Adulthood meant both self-discipline and the training of experience. Urging young people to grow up, didactic writers made sharp distinctions between boys and girls. Adolescent women tend to fall into extremes, they claim: of frivolity, of pseudo-masculine claims to independence, of self-abnegation. The girl's weaknesses may derive, male commentators often suggest, from her sex; only stern discipline will combat them. Or, as women writers typically argue, the weaknesses may be products of the social conditions under which she lives. At any rate, the "girl's emotions lie near the surface; they are easily called out, and as easily calmed." At her school she learns "fine ladyism," learns "to grasp after show and pomp" which, since she can hardly acquire them for herself, she must aspire to achieve by advantageous marriage. Open competition is likely to "derange" her nerve-centers, which manifest "a state of greater instability [than boys'], by reason of the development of her reproductive functions." Even if she aspires to virtue, she will cultivate masochism, "self-denial," believing the ideal life to "consist in an exaggeration of the passive, instead of the active, virtues." But more typically she deviates from an obsessive concern with fashion only in order to seek "frantic independence," in Dinah Mulock's phrase. Mulock, a productive novelist herself, sees the woman's common alternatives as a "foolish aping of men's manners, habits, and costumes" or "frivolous laziness, worse than womanish inanity," and sees both as equally destructive. Like the several anonymous but presumably male commentators quoted

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above, she perceives the young woman of whom she writes as distinctly *other*. The female adolescent emerges as an alien creature, a scapegoat enabling her critics to assert by implication their own superior seriousness.

To many women writers, she presents herself as victim rather than villain: Elizabeth Anderson, a medical doctor, for example, writes of the general feeling (which she of course does not share) "that our object with girls should rather be to seclude, to administer sedatives, than to develop . . . powers of mind and character." "We may wish," she observes, "that a girl would sit by the fire and purr, and give no more trouble than a cat"; this wish, and the tendency to repression it encourages, account for young women's passivity and frivolity. But even so sympathetic an observer reveals the sense of *otherness*. Similarly, Penelope Holland, young wife of a clergyman, writing anonymously in Macmillan's Magazine in 1869 of "Our Offence, Our Defence, and Our Petition," effects, despite her use of the first person plural pronoun, an emotional separation between herself and those she describes. Explicitly and implicitly she raises familiar feminist issues: male control of all avenues of possibility, the absence of choice in female experience—both urgent problems for adolescent girls full of vague aspiration, like the young in all ages. But she also perceives in young women the potential weakness of all women writ large: from this she must separate herself. We now believe young people to embody qualities and values peculiar to their state; for our forebears, female young people in particular demonstrated what might be feared in the next generation of mothers. A sort of psychological Darwinism pervades utterances about adolescence: the asserted decadence of youth may interfere with the orderly evolution of the race. (That Darwinism had more than metaphorical force in thinking about the young may be suggested by the fact that several male writers openly express their alarm lest women's breasts might atrophy or their faces assume the hard lines of men's if they cultivated such "masculine" qualities as "self-dependence.")

Penelope Holland's essay, typifying important Victorian attitudes, is worth a closer look. Noting that "pulpit and press" denounce contemporary young women, she does not attempt to rescue them from denunciation, only to explain their folly: "there is scarcely any alternative for a girl in fashionable society, between reckless dissipation and convent life." She sketches a representative seventeen-year-old girl, "by nature intelligent, high-spirited, and warmhearted," a newspaper-reader and sermon-hearer who wishes

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to remedy some of the world's wrongs, "to have a post assigned her in the battlefield of life": a metaphor with masculine associations so strong as to suggest the futility of the attempt. The detailed account of the girl's specific frustrations in seeking meaningful possibilities of action concludes with her efforts of self-education, highly reminiscent of George Eliot's Maggie Tulliver. Only success at balls, however, wins social approval. "Compelled to live" her self-indulgent life, she finds her conscience deadened, herself falling away from her "girlish ideal." The solution for her problem, Holland argues, lies in the establishment of a "ladies' college" which by unspecified means would provide young women with opportunities for "the service of their God and of their fellowcreatures," releasing them "from their present bondage of idle selfishness."

The imagined girl in her frivolous life "sees some of her friends saved all this degradation by a happy marriage, and wishes to change her lot for one in which she might have some object to live for beyond herself, some purpose in life not wholly selfish. Hence proceed many unhappy marriages, when the bride only flies to marriage to save her from the insipid uselessness of her life. Hence also many mercenary marriages which often tempt girls by offering them a larger sphere of action." If adolescence, as society shapes it for women, forces them to stasis rather than action, so, more emphatically, does marriage, the word itself structurally paralleled to the abstract noun *uselessness* (one flies to marriage to escape uselessness), a "lot" rather than a relationship, a temptation because of the kind of "sphere" it provides. A woman may "have" an object or purpose in life; she does not *develop* goals. The suspicion that "sphere" rather than "action" is the operative word in the sentence about mercenary marriages is confirmed by the sentence immediately following: "We think if men oftener had themselves the chance of winning power, wealth, independence, and rank, by a flattering word or an expressive smile, we should hear fewer hard words on the subject." Although power and independence may make action possible, the grammatical ordering of the group of nouns suggests that they represent possessions more than opportunities. As Holland enlarges upon the situation of the unmarried woman, she makes explicit what has been implicit all along: "Treated up to the very confines of middle life as if still a child, with no more liberty or independence than at sixteen . . ." A woman remains an adolescent until she marries, regardless of age. Allowed to *have* but not to *do,* she is denied the possibility of growth.

Holland's fierce moralism derives from defensiveness about her

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own intellectual activity as well as from willingness to take young ladies more seriously as human beings than "society" takes them; she observes that the world considers it "a very black crime" that a young woman should "do profitable work with her brains." By both echoing and explaining the denunciations of press and pulpit, she justifies her own difference from the frivolous at the same time that she expresses her understanding of them. This particular kind of self-implication in the issues discussed of course belongs only to a woman, indeed only to an upper-class woman struggling to deal with her own intellectual capacities and proclivities. But all writers about adolescence are implicated in their subject if simply by the fact that they have survived their teens. Most, in the nineteenth century, attempt to deny this self-implication, using various devices to do so.

A student of mine, pressed for a definition of adulthood, once confessed her view that an adult is someone who has solved all of his or her problems, adulthood being thus a condition approximating death. The Victorian moralists on adolescence make themselves sound like self-creations of a comparable fantasy, implicitly claiming their utter transcendence of adolescent dilemmas. Their authoritative public voices appropriate the language of official morality to assert that young people embody alien and dangerous impulses which by their very existence threaten the social order. Although one may sympathize with the plight of young women, one must fear the consequences of their self-indulgence. Frivolous or saintly, seeking marriage or independence, the Victorian girl represents to those commenting on her a force to be controlled or repressed.

The novels of this period depict young women with characteristics comparable to those rendered by the moralists, but the attitudes they convey are very different. If for social commentators, the adolescent constitutes "the other," for novelists he or she becomes a version of the self. The Brontës, Eliot, Dickens, moralists all on frequent occasion, nonetheless reveal toward adolescence in their fictions a predominant wistful identification. Like Penelope Holland, they often perceive the young woman as victim; she therefore allows them to express awareness of the self's vulnerability and pleasure in the possibility of transcending weakness. Adolescence, like childhood, represents for adults something lost. Victorian novelists understand it as the time of life when everyone—even women—can make the greatest claims on the world (although the

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world is unlikely to fulfill those claims). For the static view of adolescence implied by moralistic accounts they substituted a stress on change, understanding this time of life in ways more congruent with twentieth-century psychological theory, as one of crucial transition.

In life, it goes without saying, every adult feels toward adolescents some ambivalent combination of the two attitudes I have opposed to one another: sympathetic identification and pained or angry rejection. For all of us (although we may repress one side or the other), adolescents recall our past selves yet seem alien and often threatening: the new generation, eager to replace if not to destroy us. One can attempt to resolve such feelings by urging the adolescent to leave adolescence behind as fast as possible: a common Victorian solution, despite the fact that adolescence as a kind of holding-period was an adult invention. Novelists agreed with moralists that young people must grow up, but expressed the sadness of that necessity.

When George Eliot, in *The Mill on the Floss,* tries to examine the shift from childhood to adulthood, she ends by drowning her central characters—a resolution unsatisfactory to generations of readers, made only rhetorically acceptable in the text, but inevitable because of the unresolvable nature of the characters' problems. From my immediate point of view, the novel's special interest derives from its systematic attempt to compare male and female moral development in adolescence, and from the light it sheds, in particular, on attitudes toward young women. Although Tom and Maggie Tulliver are vividly individualized, they also reveal, as Eliot takes pains to point out, characteristics peculiar to their genders. Both concern themselves with *winning* and *losing,* the structural polarities of this novel as of Penelope Holland's reflections, but more variously defined.

The material stakes for competition include not only money and the possessions it buys, but also husbands and wives. "We don't ask what a woman does, we ask whom she belongs to," Wakem explains to his son; conversely, the imagined gossip of St. Ogg's, given that Maggie had married Stephen, would exculpate her because she had won both a trousseau and a prosperous only son. Tom, accepting materialistic criteria, believes the world his oyster, as two chapter titles suggest (III, 5: "Tom Applies His Knife to the Oyster"; VI, 5: "Showing That Tom Had Opened the Oyster"). He formulates his ultimate ambition at the age of sixteen: "he was

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thinking that he would buy his father's mill and land again when he was rich enough, and improve the house and live there; he should prefer it to any smarter, newer place, and he could keep as many horses and dogs as he liked."

This plan reflects an adolescent fantasy of possession and power and glory with no awareness of costs. Its imaginative and moral level exemplify that of most of the novel's nominal adults. Characters who share Tom's view of winning—Mr. and Mrs. Tulliver, her sisters, their husbands, Wakem, Stephen—define the ideological and moral extreme which the society of *The Mill on the Floss* accepts as norm. Against this norm Maggie struggles, her difficulties, despite her utter lack of frivolity, parallel to those outlined by Holland for the upper-class girl. Her situation in life precludes obvious self-determination; she must depend on men; all her experience directs her, classically, toward preoccupation with the inner life, the locus of her selfhood.

But the crude contrast thus implied between Tom and Maggie by no means adequately suggests the moral complexity of this novel. Tom too has a moral life. The same question affects boy and girl alike: given the alternatives of winning and losing, how can an adolescent win? Winning implies competition as well as gain, in an arena shaped by adult assumptions and standards, and it implies a locatable and acceptable shared system of values. The adolescent can win only conditionally as long as he/she remains adolescent. A young woman may use her sexual power to attract a man; a young man by energy and will gets ahead in the world. To consolidate their gains, they must accept some stable self-definition, discover who they are willing to be. The adolescent wins, in other words, by ceasing to be adolescent: so the action of *The Mill on the Floss* suggests.

The implications of this fact differ as dramatically for Tom and Maggie as do their achieved definitions of "winning." Tom finds self-definition easy, but his oyster proves tasteless; Maggie struggles to discover herself, committing herself to a whole series of passionate self-definitions, and achieves nothing more than eyes of intense life in a weary face. Tom's primitive but vigorous morality gives him a premature sense of self. He never feels himself to have done wrong, "whereas Maggie was always wishing she had done something different." When Maggie appeals to her own more inclusive morality of feeling against his moral rigidity, he points out that his conduct, unlike hers, justifies his principles. As a grown

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man, twenty-three years old, he responds to Maggie's claim that feelings account for her actions by boasting that he himself has consistently suppressed feelings, finding his comfort in doing his duty. He will not allow the disgraced Maggie under his roof: "the world shall know that *I* feel the difference between right and wrong." This belief in the absolute and immediate distinction between right and wrong derives, the narrator suggests, from Tom's limited vision; more specifically, from his early commitment to an externally-authorized code of rules. "Adulthood," for Tom, depends on mere chronology, which confirms in him an identity established in early adolescence. When he goes to work at sixteen, he has already stopped growing, psychologically and morally.

Maggie's constant wish to have done something different, on the other hand, urges her toward moral experimentation controlled by her powerful desire for goodness and her enlarging awareness of others' needs. Her Victorian progress from self-will to self-sacrifice wavers when challenged by Stephen Guest. Rescued by a dream from subsequent moral and physical drift, Maggie arrives at a first halting statement of the principled position to which she will adhere until her death. Her controlling vision one of justice, the favorite virtue of philosophers, she defines it only in relation to "the heart's need," her formulation of principle dependent on her belief in the sacredness of ties of loyalty. She relies, in crisis, on all that her "past life has made dear and holy"; although Stephen reproaches her with the inadequacy of a woman's love in comparison with a man's, she remains faithful to her vision until the end.

But that end expresses the inconceivability of adulthood—like adolescence a socially-defined state—for Maggie. Having achieved a principled morality, she must live in utter isolation. The good clergyman who tries to help her admits defeat: he cannot find for her a viable way of life in her own community. She has not "grown up" in any way her society can understand; her death asserts the impossibility of her life.

Paradoxically, *The Mill on the Floss* reveals both more ardent optimism and more profound pessimism about the possibilities for female adolescents than emerge from the writings of Penelope Holland and her like. Recognizing the same social realities that lead Holland to deny that young women can choose or act, Eliot imagines a character whose determination creates the opportunity for inner change, which depends less on circumstance than on the

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capacity to respond to even the circumstance of limitation. However mysterious the sources of such a capacity, its power manifests itself unmistakably: Maggie's eyes of intense life declare her energy. Compared to Holland's seventeen-year-old, Eliot's heroine achieves moral triumph.

On the other hand, she drowns; Holland's young woman only marries—at worst a metaphorical drowning. Holland, like the other moralists, holds an ideal of adulthood; her anger at the restriction of female opportunity feeds on faith in some conceivable alternative. A comparable vision appears no more available to George Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss* than to her protagonist Maggie. To be sure, in other novels Eliot provided wise and fulfilled adults: the Garths in *Middlemarch,* for example, with their informed acceptance of painful reality—an ideal of sorts, but not one the young would rush to embrace. Dorothea Brooke marries, survives to participate in adult life; so, imagined by other women, do Cathy Linton (whom we leave, in *Wuthering Heights,* on the point of marriage), and Jane Eyre, and even Charlotte Brontë's staunch Shirley. Yet the atmosphere of compromise surrounding these marriages in novels of female experience suggests, more ambiguously than *The Mill on the Floss,* comparable doubts about the relation between female existance and self-fulfillment. Adolescent girls must grow up or die; both fates have dark and bright aspects.

Does adult male existence provide more obvious satisfactions? Victorian didactic prose does not take up the question. Conveying the view that adulthood, for men, means civilization, it expresses outrage and concealed admiration for the barbarism of the young. Adolescent boys, like their female counterparts, tend toward excess, but in different areas. Development from infancy to manhood recapitulates racial evolution. Boys may appear miniature adults, "but watch them by themselves, and you will see that, at home and school alike, they possess many of the noblest virtues, many of the meanest vices of a less civilized age." No instances of noble virtue emerge from the anonymous essayist's subsequent reflections, but he details the male adolescent "vices" noted by many commentators. "They are apt to be selfish and violent; to feel at times a positive pleasure in giving pain and annoyance to others; to abuse physical strength to the torment of their weaker companions." Such moral defects differ from those attributed to girls specifically in their relation to adult life. Most observers note, with varying degrees of approval, the extreme competitiveness of adolescent boys

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and the establishment in school of hierarchies of strength, patterns of dominance and submission. One must regret the "pain" and "torment" involved, but critics appear to feel it inevitable: one of them notes "the innate, we had almost said the mysterious, tendency to abuse personal strength and size, to torment, tease, and tyrannize over the younger and weaker." And this "tendency" bears some clear relation to the spirit of "generous emulation" which another moralist praises in public schools, explicitly contrasting it with the petty rivalries of young women. Call it tyranny or emulation, the will to compete and to triumph foretells success in the world of business and politics; the boy even in his flaws is making himself a man to reckon with, unlike the girl, whose inadequacies will make her an inadequate woman. The critic who comments on the mysterious tendency to tyrannize observes also boys' necessary moral difference from females: "Be they never so good, they will not sacrifice themselves for others as their mothers do; they will have, at best, an inordinate respect for personal strength and agility; they will often take a provokingly distorted view of the actions and motives of their elders." This statement of negative qualities contains an undertone of respect—or perhaps envy. Boys are distinctly other than, even alien from, men, more primitive, less civilized. Grown-up men try to civilize them—but preferably without destroying their primitive energy, energy being, as Samuel Smiles explained in *Self Help,* the most crucial single requirement for success. Misuse of energy creates the weaknesses of adolescent boys, criticized as harshly as their female counterparts, but with some lurking awareness of their potential for triumphant adulthood. Girls, in contrast, seem potentially as well as actually negligible. It all sounds very familiar.

No one appears to worry about the relations of mothers and daughters; many concern themselves with fathers and sons. William Cobbett, in 1829, confesses his motivation for striving to improve his own children: "I could not be *sure* that my children would love me as they loved their own lives; but I was, at any rate, resolved to deserve such love at their hands; and, in possession of that, I felt that I could set calamity, of whatever description, at defiance." From wish to fantasy is an easy step: Cobbett's moralizing always hints his conviction that the young *must* love him. Herbert Spencer justifies his doctrine of the "discipline of natural consequences" partly on the ground that it prevents those horrifying "mutual exasperations and estrangements" between father and

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son which other modes of discipline may encourage. Some moralists try to bludgeon the young into compliance: Charles Kingsley, for instance, announces that "a disobedient, self-willed son, who is seeking his own credit and not his father's, his own pleasure and not his parent's comfort; a son who is impatient of being kept in order and advised, who despises his parent's counsel, and will have none of his reproof"—such a son must prove incapable of grasping or accepting the truths of Christianity, deprived of salvation by self-will.

If, however, exaggerated self-will belongs naturally to this time of life, no amount of moralistic bullying will do much good. Isaac Taylor, a serious thinker about adolescence and the preceding developmental stages, suggests that "young persons" come inevitably to an increasing interest in the world outside and in their own futures, an interest which "cannot but divert, a little, their affections from their parents, however fondly and sincerely they may be loved." Following Rousseau, Taylor declares adolescence the happiest period of life. He also perceives it as marked by its overflowing energy and its self-absorption. Education—particularly *home* education—can direct energy toward the acquisition of knowledge and turn self-absorption toward self-development. (Samuel Smiles, with his tiny biographies of successful men, tries to effect a similar goal.) The would-be teacher thus modifies the adolescent threat by endeavoring to control youthful power.

Taylor's approach, in this respect at least, epitomizes one popular mode of confronting male adolescence in print. The opposite extreme, berating the young for qualities which the alarmed moralist perceives as foretelling the nation's fall, also has many adherents. An anonymous piece called "Our Modern Youth," published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1863, provides an illuminating counterpart for Penelope Holland's essay on young women. The 1863 polemicist, certainly male, concerns himself with boys and girls alike, reserving a particularly ferocious salvo for the follies of current feminism. His treatment of adolescent males, however, articulates with special intensity and clarity the fears of his generation about their successors.

The essay begins by declaring "the deep national importance of the mental condition of the rising generation." Acknowledging the wide-spread interest in educational issues, the commentator argues that it has obscured facts about the actual state of the young. Their great sin is "self-assurance. Afraid of nothing, abashed at nothing,

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astonished at nothing, they are ever comfortably assured of their own perfect competence to do or say the right thing in any given position." The writer's outrage suggests his fear. Adults, his implicit argument goes, win the right to self-confidence by arduous effort and achievement. To precede achievement by confidence devalues the rewards of maturity. The young now *take* rather than *win* grown-up privilege.

Moreover, they claim equality. Democracy both causes and reflects the assertiveness of youth; America shows England's evils in intensified form. "The parental rule is more relaxed than among ourselves, the spirit of independence and the arrogant tone more marked among the young. It is asserted that public opinion operates to narrow the exercise of the most legitimate authority to such a degree that the discipline necessary for education is almost abandoned, and a mother has been known to say that she *dared* not punish her child. Every youth feels that independence will soon be within his grasp and exults in the almost boundless field open to his energies. His ignorance and inexperience may naturally seem no obstacles, when the constitution of his country considers such drawbacks no impediment to the possession of the most serious political privileges." The point—the underlying fear—becomes clearer a few sentences further on: "Where go-ahead is the ruling principle of life, those who have most energy for the race and most prospect of distancing others will necessarily hold the first rank; and these must be the young, the men of action, as opposed to the men of thought and experience." The older man preferring not to be distanced must shift the ground of competition, claiming, as this essayist explicitly does, his own moral superiority, wisdom, and perception. Yet "these gray-hearted boys," as he calls them in a moment of open anger at their lack of sensibility, their failure of feeling, arrogantly claim a triumph which may in fact be real.

What the essayist attributes to America he sees all around him: the key words (*independence, arrogance, energies, ignorance*) echo through the essay, defining the power of the young. The spatial metaphors in the passage on America emphasize the writer's sense of chaos. The exercise of legitimate authority—adult authority—*narrows,* while the youth finds a "boundless field," discovering "no obstacles" in what should constitute serious impediments. Young people, in this version of things, get ever more; adults, ever less. Nor does the commentator know what to do about this state of affairs. After a penultimate paragraph of questions implying almost total

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despair, the essay ends in uncertainty: "it is not too soon to seek around us for some methods of dealing with the young which shall look a little deeper than those now in vogue into principles of human nature and the best interests of society." The unsureness of vocabulary (what kind of *methods* might "look a little deeper"?), the vagueness of allusion, the tentativeness of advocated action all reinforce the feeling that this article has dramatized as well as partially described a clash between young and old in which sureness and victory belong to the young.

Woman writers who discuss the prototypical girl confidently assert her eagerness to reform, given the opportunity. The cause of evil lies without; the will to change inheres in the young woman. Even male writers less certain than Penelope Holland of society's responsibility for female frivolity tacitly assume that a young woman properly instructed will be capable of reform. The adult world that instructs and summons her embodies wisdom and privilege as well as sobriety; if the promise it holds forth is, as Holland argues, partly illusory (women being urged toward adulthood but never fully admitted to its rights), the idea of adulthood still exerts a powerful pull on the girl.

The boy, moralists suggest, is different, his defiance of "mature" standards issuing from profound causes. To him too his elders offer the command, "Grow up! Be like us!", eager to neutralize his threat by welcoming him among them. The moralists admire as well as fear the force of male adolescence. They directly acknowledge no corresponding part of themselves; on the other hand, whether they rage or persuade, they imply no great faith in the possiblity of converting youth to grown-up unless they lure him with the promise of social and professional position which will provide new forms of power. Writers on education in particular assume that ambition motivates young men to convert school's crude competition into sophisticated adult analogues, a progress which constitutes civilization.

The contrast we have seen between sober journalistic views of young men and young women conforms to what we know already about the comparative positions of men and women a bit more than a century ago. Thinking back to Tom Tulliver, however, we may recall that his ascent to adulthood, although more "successful" than Maggie's, brings him few rewards. His financial prosperity intensifies his self-esteem, yet his life seems devoid of deep satisfaction. Direct social commentary of the Victorian period confirms a

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sense of absolute division between the fates of young men and young women and between the feelings of adults toward each of the sexes. Fiction, despite its social realism, suggests, on the contrary, that youthful male and female experience bear a close resemblance to one another: this fiction seems to come from a different world. Novels assign to the two genders comparable psychic outcomes and convey congruent attitudes toward them. Emotional danger and psychic cost assume different forms yet weigh equally on both sexes. Long before Richard Feverel loses his bride, he discovers the virtual impossibility of living with her a responsible adult life—not because of her weaknesses, because of his utter lack of readiness for adulthood. David Copperfield marries a child and learns the frustration of attempting to conduct professional and domestic affairs without really growing up. He declares his desire for adulthood, at the novel's end he has married the right woman, yet an elegiac tone dominates the final summary of his success. For what "really growing up" means, to Feverel and Copperfield and many other male fictional protagonists, is not what one would assume from reading tracts on education or morals. It has little to do with career or competition, involving primarily what David Copperfield calls the "discipline of the heart"—Maggie Tulliver's discipline.

Moralists and educational theorists make a sharp, usually explicit, distinction between the proper concerns of the two sexes. Isaac Taylor, for example, in many respects liberal in his views, nonetheless asserts categorically that girls lack the intellectual capacities of boys, excelling rather "in steadiness and elevation of principle, and in force and depth of feeling." Principle and feeling belong to women, who may (and should) help men to achieve them too. In nineteenth-century novels, however, the struggle to use feeling properly and to achieve "steadiness and elevation of principle" creates the chief problems of adolescent males. Pip, in *Great Expectations*, defines himself initially, as the title suggests, in terms of what he is to be given: wealth, social position, Estella to love. As painfully as Maggie, though by a different process, he learns to attend to "the heart's need" and to accept the ultimate authority of old ties. Like Maggie, he must give up all he wants, or believes he wants. He does not drown at the end; in fact, in the second version of the ending, he expects to be united with Estella. Yet the first ending, which declares the impossibility of the union, more logically concludes the narrative. Even if the marriage took place, the chastening process which Pip has undergone has left him so strait-

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ened, so diminished in aspiration and in self-esteem, so unable to grow up in any full sense, though forced to abandon childish illusions, that one cannot anticipate much joy in it. Here we see an imagined version of precisely the education the *Fraser's Magazine* moralist would recommend for "Our Modern Youth," the reverse of that state of affairs he describes in America: the "almost boundless field" which seems open to Pip at the beginning narrows until he finds impediment everywhere. In every moral respect, his education effects improvement: Pip at the end has grown more attractive, more wise, far more sensitive than he was in early adolescence. Yet the feeling of loss dominates over the perception of gain. The gap between great expectations and diminished actuality reveals itself gradually; we recognize the moral insufficiency of the expectations, find something familiar in the actuality, know the necessity of coming to terms with the everyday, but continue to wish that life might be otherwise.

Such a wish of course reflects the longing to hold onto the sense of high possibility uniquely associated with adolescence. As certainly as *Wuthering Heights* expresses the conflict between the gratifications of adolescent narcissism and those of mature relationship, *Great Expectations* articulates the tension between the pleasures of adolescent fantasy and the more dubious satisfactions of adult realism. In neither case can any simple resolution dismiss the problem: if we applaud Cathy Linton for her painful discovery of Hareton's virtues and of her need for him, we continue to feel far more involved with her mother's fate; we approve of Pip in his final renunciations and acceptances, yet identify more passionately with his younger, grandiose self. Catherine and Heathcliff mistreat the gentler folk who surround them; we conventionally disapprove, while thrilling to this evidence of the overriding force of a grand passion. Pip mistreats that infinitely virtuous natural man, Joe, and calls the reader's attention to his moral failure. We take the point, we know already how unlikely Pip is to find the road paved with gold and Estella at his side, we know that the moral worth of Joe and Biddy far exceeds that of Miss Havisham and Estella; yet we want, at some profound level, just what Pip wants. On such emotional conflicts does the nineteenth-century novel of adolescence turn, forcing adult readers to acknowledge in themselves the survival of ancient impulse. A century earlier, novels reported their protagonists' straightforward (although sometimes impeded) progress toward the adult place in the world established by marriage and by

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the social definition of clear heredity, occupation, or alliance. Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, Roderick Random might not know what they wanted, but when they found out, they never had to change their minds; the reader can simply share characters' and novelists' assumption that adulthood implies possession of life's goods. By the twentieth century, adolescents in fiction could claim moral superiority to the corrupt adult society around them. Although that society might defeat them, readers and characters need feel no uncertainty about where true value lies. Eliot and Dickens, a hundred years ago, both demonstrate clear awareness of society's corruptions without accepting the corollary that adolescence should triumph. The wisdom their protagonists acquire in transcending their adolescent state does not enable them to lead viable lives; neither does it enable them to avoid, or even consciously to wish to avoid, the responsibilities of adulthood. Eliot and Dickens, consequently, have trouble with their endings. Their readers re-experience in their novels of youth some of life's most profound conflicts, and the impossibility of resolving them. "It was an uncomfortable consideration," Pip remarks, "on a twenty-first birthday, that coming of age at all seemed hardly worthwhile in such a guarded and suspicious world as [Jaggers] made of it." The worth of "coming of age" remains ambiguous to the end of *Great Expectations*.

Pip's effort to discover his identity originally assumes forms comparable to those familiar from the eighteenth-century novel. Like Tom Jones, he takes for granted the need to function in the world, believing that possession of wealth and other concomitants of the gentleman will insure success. Unlike Maggie Tulliver, he does not seek to define himself through moral achievement, which is, rather, thrust upon him. As his assumptions and expectations begin to totter, he finds it necessary to re-assess his brief history. This process differs from Maggie's eventual coming to terms with her past specifically in his conscious realization that a personal history consists not only in a set of experiences but in a set of interpretations, infinitely alterable. Pip has manufactured his version of reality out of slight materials; he comes to recognize it as a construction comparable to the grotesque setting Miss Havisham has made for herself. "As I looked round . . . at the stopped clock, and at the withered articles of bridal dress upon the table and the ground, and her own awful figure with its ghostly reflection . . . , I saw in everything the construction that my mind had come to, repeated and thrown back to me." Miss Havisham's construction

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of course determines the possibilities of her adult life; so does Pip's. When he finally realizes the utter "simplicity and fidelity" that Joe and Biddy represent, he realizes also his "own worthless conduct to them," and concludes, "I could never, never, never undo what I had done." He can change his mind, and does, but not his past action. To recognize the ineluctability of conduct marks an important stage of his moral development.

Like Maggie, as I have said, Pip comes to realize the heart's importance; like Maggie, he finds the realization of little use in the world; like Maggie, he has no viable model of adulthood. The lovable adults, here as in other Dickens novels, are children at heart: Joe, all generous feeling, but perceived even by a very young Pip as essentially a fellow-child; Mr. Pocket, incompetent to deal with economic facts; even Magwitch, whose view of the world manifests the child's incapacity to incorporate complexity. Miss Havisham herself, living in her own "construction," epitomizes the refusal to grow up. At the other extreme, having totally repressed the child within, Mrs. Joe and Mr. Jaggers embody successful adult dominance. With Pip, the reader wonders at their power; but one cannot wish Pip to imitate them. The schizophrenic Wemmick, child at home, Jaggers-like at work, has found a more attractive solution to life's problems, but he hardly supplies a model. Pip, like Tom Tulliver, is reduced to a commitment to work, but without Tom's sense of a goal to be won. His role as onlooker at the happy marriages of others cannot resolve his problems; his love for Estella seems only clinging fantasy. He has come to know the value of love and of relationship without finding much object for his own emotional capacity; Maggie, with her deep devotion to Tom consummated in her death, in this respect proves more fortunate than Pip. Although society allows the young man far more opportunity than his female counterpart, the male adolescent entering adulthood, in this and other nineteenth-century novels, finds no happier life than the young woman. Even Tom Brown, that hearty specimen of idealized British youth, embarks on marriage, at the end of *Tom Brown at Oxford*, with a pervasive, emphasized, unexplained sense of sadness. Something goes wrong, these novelists suggest, as adolescence ends.

Of course young men and women are not rendered as experiencing the same difficulties in the same way. Looking at Pip with the perspective established by the journalists and moralizers, one can find the predictable male traits. His competitiveness and

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desire to triumph manifest themselves at home in his attitude toward Trabb's boy, later in his obsessive contests with Bentley Drummle and in his self-display at Jaggers' dinner table. He seeks satisfaction mainly in the world outside, not, like Maggie, within. His mind focuses on the future. He values physical strength and prowess, he assumes the subordination even while feeling the power of women, he overflows with energy. His assumptions and his purposes differ from Maggie's; he comes to the doctrine of benevolence by the road of insistent self-assertion, self-absorption, self-display, rather than, like Maggie, through the temptations of self-sacrifice and of submission.

Yet the fact remains: whether they depict male or female adolescence, the novelists of the nineteenth century reveal a conviction that growing up is both necessary and regrettable, involving a discipline of the heart with all the rigorous implications of the abstract noun, a discipline which restrains, restricts, subordinates, punishes, controls the life of feeling; which implies loss. Moralists often express anger at their sense of the reprehensible aspects of adolescence; novelists stress the sadness of relinquishment. Both sorts of writer share a single set of established moral assumptions, agreeing in what they value, differing in their ways of relating value to feeling. The difference seems natural enough: to perceive a character from outside, as the generalizing moralist must, implies a perspective opposed to that of imagining his or her inner reality. The novelist recalls and fantasizes what it feels like to be adolescent, the moralist comments on the social significance of adolescent action and inaction.

On the other hand, in a period when Ruskin and Mill alike testify, from opposite ideological positions, to the profound differences between the social experiences of men and of women, it is surprising to discover that important male novelists who deal with male adolescence (Dickens, Meredith, Butler) and important female novelists of female adolescence (Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Gaskell, Eliot) evoke similar kinds of private experience. And it is surprising, too, that the adolescents described by moralists and journalists seem so consistently "bad," by the official standards of the age, when the adolescents of fiction, usually "good" in impulse, at any rate learn to practice and to value the kind of goodness which Victorian public utterances associate with female morality and sensibility. (One may except the elder Catherine of *Wuthering Heights,* who dies instead of learning.)

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The same duality of feeling—the sense of the adolescent's dangerous otherness and of his sameness—which a century ago was so conveniently locatable according to literary genre, of course remains with us today. Nevitt Sanford, a psychologist writing on twentieth-century educational problems, comments on "our mixed feelings toward" adolescents, elaborating: "On the one hand we tend to live vicariously in them, to identify ourselves with some of their radical or offbeat doings, but at the same time they make us nervous because we are not entirely sure they are going to settle down in a few years and be just like everybody else." Nor are we unambiguously sure that we want them to, conscious as we must be of the cost of achieving, the pain of enduring, the discipline and responsibility of adulthood. Sometimes we, like our ancestors, urge the young to grow up; sometimes, instead, we imitate them. Our journalism, like our fiction, expresses both sides of the ambivalence that survives whether adolescence is understood as a distinct culture (a prevailing view today) or as only an arc of the life cycle, an inevitable stage in man's repetitious progress toward civilization. Adults necessarily see in the young both their lost selves and their realized terrors. The mythology of the Victorians, like our own, uses the figure of the adolescent to articulate the conflict between the urgency of progress and the temptation of regress, a conflict as vivid in an earlier society committed to public morality as in the present one of private self-development.

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G. THOMAS COUSER

The Shape of Death in American Autobiography

BIRTH, THE BEGINNING OF LIFE, offers a convenient starting point for an autobiography, but death is necessarily unavailable as a conclusion. Barring unusual circumstances or a suicidal act, the narrative is unlikely to end simultaneously with the writer's life; barring some sort of miracle, the narrative cannot include an account of the writer's death. Of all the significant events of a person's life, then, his own death would seem to be unique in lying beyond the scope of autobiography. Yet many classic American autobiographies betray the pressure of a profound concern with death. The expectation of death may impel the writer, as though the composition of an autobiography might help him to compose himself in the face of death. Or he may hope that the finished narrative will endow him with a kind of immortality. More importantly, the form and content of the narratives are often significantly shaped by the writer's preoccupation with death, even though the event itself eludes direct treatment. Two problems overlap here in an interesting way. As a mortal, the writer may seek to come to terms with death. As an autobiographer, he may want to write a conclusion which, in its finality and significance, will somehow be equivalent to his own death. A surprising number of our major autobiographers anticipate or offer a substitute for their own deaths; some even point beyond it, offering intimations of their own immortality. Each solution is original and reflects the autobiographer's vision of life as well as his conception of death.

A concern for death and immortality pervades Puritan spiritual autobiography, for its composition was ultimately a devotional act which served as preparation for death. The saint could not claim absolute certainty about his status and hence about the fate of his soul after death. Nor could he conceive of himself as achieving personal immortality by writing an autobiography, any more than he could imagine himself earning grace. Nevertheless, since his spiritual autobiography was often intended to serve as a parental

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model for his children after his death, his narrative stressed the positive. While his diary served as a medium for ongoing self-examination and characteristically expressed uncertainty and anguish, his full life narrative provided an opportunity to assemble and review the evidence of divine favoritism toward him. Jonathan Edwards deviated somewhat from the norm by omitting any reference to posterity and by focusing on saving rather than common grace. Thus, as evidence of his election, he cited his intense inner experience of grace itself rather than examples of providential interference in his life. His variation on the Puritan practice resulted in an especially pure expression of the essence of Puritan piety concerning death and immortality.

For Edwards, conversion was like conception; it was not the climax of a sequence of preparatory stages but a mysterious, nearly imperceptible transformation which initiated a gradual growth in grace. One manifestation of this change was a "calm, sweet abstraction of the soul from all the concerns of the world." The narrative conveys this by veering repeatedly from a specific time and place to a timeless sensation of mystical rapture. Instead of portraying himself as an active servant of God in history, Edwards shows himself being drawn passively from the world to God, from the temporal to the eternal—a progression which points toward the ultimate mystical union with God after death.

This progress was not without apparent reversals, however, for Edwards' new sense of himself was a paradoxical one which made for an unstable emotional life. Even if the self could be completed and perfected in God, it was still corrupt and worthless in itself. The wish to be "swallowed up in God" invoked the obverse side of Calvinist self-consciousness—the need to be "emptied and annihilated." Edwards' suggestion that true self-fulfillment comes only through the annihilation of individuality is simply an expression of a paradox of Puritan piety. Edwards accepted this paradox and seemed to welcome the progressive loss of selfhood which growth in grace entailed. Far from fearing self-annihilation, Edwards seems to rush eagerly toward it in his *Personal Narrative*. To a modern reader, the narrative may seem to betray a strong death-wish, but in Puritan terms it simply expresses an unusually intense yearning for complete sanctification. In any event, the structural principle of growth in grace points toward the resolution of the paradoxes of Edwards' piety beyond death, and his description of moments of mystical absorption conveys his sense of what death must be like.

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Sanctification and death lay beyond autobiography, of course, but his narrative clearly anticipates events it could not include. In form and content, it is oriented toward an ultimate and ineffable experience.

Quaker spiritual autobiography in general is concerned less with the matter of election than with the problem of enacting divine truth in a sometimes hostile world. Thus, John Woolman's *Journal,* the Quaker classic which corresponds to Edwards' *Personal Narrative,* is characterized by an acutely conscientious involvement in the world rather than a mystical abstraction from it. Still, like any spiritual autobiographer, Woolman was concerned with spiritual crises, like conversion, which were analogous to death and rebirth and with the lifelong process of self-submission to the divine impulse. Woolman's growth in grace takes the form of the progressive refinement of the essential Quaker testimonies of simplicity, equality, peace, and community. This process involved him in a deepening identification with the brotherhood of man rather than an exclusive intimacy with God.

The last and most dramatic of his visions, which occurred during a severe illness, epitomizes this process and reflects the way in which his Quakerly consciousness dealt with the prospect of self-annihilation:

> I was brought so near the gates of death that I forgot my name. Being thus desirous to know who I was, I saw a mass of matter of gloomy colour between the South and the East, and was informed that the mass was human beings in as great misery as they could be and live and that I was mixed in with them and henceforth might not consider myself as a distinct or separate being. I then heard a soft, melodious voice, . . . and I believed it was the voice of an angel who spake to other angels. The words were, "John Woolman is dead."

This vision can be interpreted in several ways—as a confirmation of Woolman's conversion, which involved a sense of the death of his will; as a mystical intuition of the oneness of humanity; and as an anticipation of his death. Significantly, his vision suggests that his sanctification is contingent on his acceptance of his involvement with the mass of sinful and suffering humanity. The way to God is not out of the temporal world, as it was for Edwards, but through identification with his fellow man. Like Edwards, however, Woolman does tend to prophesy his death and to envision his eventual union with God.

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Such a vision would have made an appropriate conclusion to the narrative, but the *Journal* does not end with that passage. Rather, it ends in various ways in different editions. Each is fitting in its own fashion, but two in particular reflect the impulse to complete an autobiographical narrative with a reference to death. In the most authoritative edition, the final passage consists of Woolman's account of a friend's death. After describing his deathbed vision of the evil of slavery, Woolman wrote: ". . . he appeared calm . . . , death in about one hour appeared evidently upon him, and I believe about five hours from my going in he quietly breathed his last; and as I believe he left no more memorandum in writing of that dream or vision of the night, at this time I believe it seasonable for me to do it." Here, by substituting this Friend's exemplary death for his own, Woolman gives his conclusion an effective finality and achieves, as an autobiographer, a last example of the kind of selfless act the *Journal* was intended to encourage.

In another edition, the supposedly impossible happens: the narrative ends with an account of Woolman's death. This was achieved not by a miraculous agency but rather through a kind of communal ghostwriting: the Quaker editorial committee decided to conclude their edition of the *Journal* with an account of Woolman's final illness and death in England written by the Friends who had attended him. Although this addition cannot be considered part of the text itself, it is an appropriate conclusion to a narrative that focuses on communal concerns. Furthermore, it is faithful to the impulse, if not to the text, of the most authoritative edition, for the English Friends simply did for Woolman what he had done for another Friend.

In the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin, a contemporary of both Edwards and Woolman, we encounter a resolutely secular mind which treats death and immortality very differently. The context of the autobiography is no longer an orthodox faith; rather, it is a mature deism—a "natural religion" organized around the most useful tenets of the many religions with which Franklin was familiar. Part of this personal religion was a belief in an afterlife in which the individual would be treated according to his conduct on earth. However, Franklin seemed more confident of the social utility of this belief than of its truth. He was by nature skeptical, and while he was willing to believe in a system of posthumous rewards and punishments, he would have preferred to have empirical verification of it. Thus, in apparent earnestness, he made an

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agreement with a friend that the first of them to die should visit the other and "acquaint him how he found things in that Separate state."

Franklin's deism went far toward lodging will, initiative, and responsibility with man rather than God. The implications of such a religion for the autobiographical treatment of death and immortality are best approached through a consideration of his conception of his autobiography as a revised edition of his life. As a young man, he had composed an epitaph for himself employing a similar metaphor: "The Body of B. Franklin. Printer; Like the Cover of an Old Book, Its contents torn out, And stript of its Lettering and Gilding, Lies here, Food for Worms, But the Work shall not be wholly Lost: For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more, In a new and more perfect Edition, Corrected and amended by the Author." Except for his confidence in his own sanctification, there is little here to alarm an orthodox Calvinist, and much of the wit would have pleased a Puritan elegist. However, the ruling metaphor in the opening passage of the autobiography has radically different implications. For in playfully begging the advantage, in writing his autobiography, that "Authors have in a second edition to correct some Faults of the First," Franklin assumes the role he previously assigned to God, and the book takes the place of the immortal soul as the revised edition of the man's life. For the traditional spiritual autobiographer, God was ultimately the Author of the autobiography even as he was the Creator of the saint; here, Franklin boldly claims full responsibility for his autobiography and by implication for his life. Thus, while Franklin seems to retain a fairly conventional notion of the afterlife, his conception of autobiography is a novel one which implies that the autobiographer can create or guarantee a kind of immortality for himself. Having lived, as he believed, a life of social utility, Franklin sought to extend his usefulness beyond death by creating an autobiographical model worthy of imitation. Instead of anxiously scanning his experience for evidence of his election, he confidently nominated himself for immortality. This notion of autobiography as self-preservation derived from Franklin's exploitation of the latitude allowed him by his deism.

In writing his autobiography, then, Franklin was not rehearsing for death in the manner of Edwards and Woolman; rather, he was replaying and recreating his life. Although his method was sometimes analytical and always didactic, he did not allow his great

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vitality or his sense of his value and consequence as an individual to be obscured. Indeed, more than it is a story of success or upward mobility, his autobiography is the story of the steady extension of his sphere of influence. Yet, ironically, as the power of the autobiographical character increased, the power of the narrator diminished: toward the end of the narrative, the writing becomes dull and drained of wit and individuality. The result is as though Franklin had sacrificed the personal dimension of his life when he took his place on the public stage. Because of age and infirmity, Franklin fell far short of bringing his narrative up to date, but once his interests and those of the restless colonies had become identical, autobiography became history and there was no need for Franklin to continue his story. While the narrative trails off inconclusively, the effect is sufficiently final. Having identified himself not merely as a public servant but as the representative of the American colonies, Franklin disappeared into history.

Thoreau and Whitman both felt very acutely the pressure of time's inexorable passage to death. However, their Transcendentalism offered at least a partial solution to this problem, for it suggested that they could somehow live above time and individual identity. While *Walden* and *Cape Cod,* "Song of Myself" and *Specimen Days,* are not conventional autobiographies, they can be read as Transcendentalist versions of the spiritual autobiography or as installments in ongoing autobiographical narratives. These works vary significantly in their treatment of death, but they share a strong impulse to defy it.

Walden is the story of Thoreau's attempt to escape the spiritual death suffered by most Americans by seeking union with a divine spirit. Essentially, his strategy was to step out of society and history to immerse himself in Nature. In this endeavor, he discovered a solution to an autobiographical problem as well, for by substituting the cycle of the seasons for historical time in *Walden,* Thoreau arrived at a structural device which both marks the passage of time and suggests his transcendence of it. Because it is the season which most threatens living creatures, winter stands for death, but Thoreau takes advantage of the forced asceticism of winter life to achieve a richer spiritual life. Then, having identified himself with the pond, Thoreau, too, comes alive again when the ice goes out. Thus, the cycle ends with the season of rebirth and redemption—a conclusion which provides an ecstatic climax. Equally important, the seamlessness of the cycle, which is not only self-renewing but endlessly repeatable, enables the narrative to suggest all the tran-

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scendent possibilities of life even as it achieves a sense of an ending rare in autobiography.

While *Walden* warned against death by suffocation in civilization, *Cape Cod* seems more concerned with death by drowning in the ocean. To Thoreau, Cape Cod was another country—not a pastoral inland landscape but a barren and forbidding seascape. There he confronted a violent and impersonal environment which challenged man's ability to adapt and survive. His narrative opens with a scene of shipwreck, where Thoreau's attention focuses on "the livid, swollen, and mangled body of a drowned girl, . . . the coiled-up wreck of a human hulk." This corpse epitomizes the ocean's death-dealing power, its ability to destroy humans and their fragile constructs—whether physical, like the brig, or intellectual, like Thoreau's faith in Nature's harmony and benevolence. Thoreau's travels on Cape Cod seem to have constituted a kind of temptation in the wilderness, and *Cape Cod* takes the form of a pilgrimage in which Thoreau seeks to temper and reaffirm his Transcendentalism.

The first chapter is filled with false starts, including a pious assertion that sympathy for the shipwrecked Irish immigrants is unnecessary because they have simply "emigrated to a newer world." This resolution of the problem is unsatisfactory because it depends on supernatural compensation for a natural disaster; it "solves" the problem at the cost of heretically separating God from Nature. A truly Transcendental resolution is not achieved easily or early; Thoreau reaffirms his faith only after a painstaking process of acclimating himself to an environment which confounds all his preconceptions. In his investigation of the landscape, Thoreau makes two saving discoveries. First, he learns to recognize the processes of compensation at work within Nature to maintain a dynamic vital equilibrium. The ocean is a creator as well as a destroyer of life. Erosion in one place means the extension of land elsewhere, as at Hog Island, where the "wrecks of isles were being faithfully arranged into new shores." Secondly, he discovers the possibilities of human accommodation to the landscape. If shipwreck and death are facts of life on the Cape, so are salvage and survival, for where there are wrecks there are "wreckers"—ingenious natives who salvage usefulness from disaster. A lighthouse becomes a symbol of salvation and stability in a world of flux, and the keeper, who struggles "to keep his light shining before men," a model of an indigenous faith.

The affirmative climax of the narrative comes with Thoreau's

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discovery of a successful communal project to prevent Provincetown from being inundated by the sandy tide of the dunes. The natives' strategy was simple: they used beach grass to anchor sand hills which in turn held back the dunes. Though the anchor cables were slender, they were strong, and Thoreau chose to believe in their tenacity. Here Thoreau found redeeming evidence of Nature's readiness to cooperate with man, and this example of human resourcefulness allowed him to reaffirm his faith in man and Nature. There is no mention here of transcendence or universal redemption; Thoreau had come a long way from the confident conclusion of *Walden.* Death remained an incontrovertible fact; immortality, a distant hope. But Thoreau's affirmation, however tentative, however long in coming, indicated that he had learned to live not only in proximity but in peace with death.

Even more than Thoreau, Whitman was plagued by insecurity and anxiety. In compensation, a sense of transcendence and a hope of immortality pervade his poetry. "Song of Myself" is even further from conventional autobiography than *Walden* and *Cape Cod,* but it is so because Whitman took Emersonian ideas about the self even more literally than Thoreau and because Whitman was bolder in creating formal equivalents for those beliefs. After all, the poem purports to be a representation of an actual mystical experience, and while there is no hard external evidence that Whitman had such an experience, the poem itself is compelling testimony. If we think of the poem, which recounts a kind of conversion experience and its consequences, as a kind of Transcendentalist spiritual autobiography, we can see how it was shaped by Whitman's concern with death. For Whitman's vision carried him not only out of history but out of time altogether.

The poem begins as a retrospective narrative, but the mystical experience of section 5 annihilates the past and initiates a present timeless existence. Henceforth, the loose associational structure and the constant flow of present participles express Whitman's confidence in his transcendence of time and mortality. Whitman replaces literal chronology with a loose, symbolic chronology—from the conception of the poet in the sexual imagery of the mystical experience, to his gestation, birth, death, and rebirth. Even this symbolic progression is implied only to be disrupted by Whitman's compression and expansion of normal temporal sequences. Now he projects himself backward beyond birth to identify with the entire process of evolution; now he propels himself forward beyond death with the promise to wait and welcome the

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reader to eternity. Taking advantage of his visionary medium, Whitman includes an account of his own death (described as though he willed it): "I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lazy jags./ I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love." The ultimate effect is paradoxical, that of an autobiography written in the present tense, one which conveys not only Whitman's confidence in his eventual triumph over death but also a sense of immediate victory over time itself.

Specimen Days, which is closer to conventional autobiography in its use of prose and its chronological structure, was written partly for the purpose of simple self-preservation, as Whitman admitted. But linked to this motive was a desire to verify the existence of the self he had envisioned in "Song of Myself." So the major thrust of the narrative is to capture, in the medium of prose non-fiction, the timeless existence of Whitman's transcendent self. Only the first section is written retrospectively; after that Whitman presents the reader with a succession of concrete and immediate impressions of the Civil War, of Nature, and of the American landscape. In his attempt to document the ineffable, Whitman intuitively arrived at a technique which both grounds his existence in history and hints at his transcendence of time: the spontaneously jotted notes are all dated, but they are written in the present tense. The effect is of a past preserved as a continuous present, an "eternal now." The succession of present instants, and the style, with its seemingly endless sentences and its proliferation of present participles, convey a sense not of growth in chronological sequence but of the ability to live deeply in the moment.

Whitman witnessed much death and suffering during the Civil War, but his role as a nurse and his identification with the quasi-divine cause of "Unionism" helped him to maintain a sense of equilibrium. Later, like Thoreau, he retreated from history and its wounds into Nature in search of health. Finally on July 22, 1878, his efforts at self-regeneration succeeded, and he was rewarded with a renewed sense of transcendence and a promise of immortality: "As if for the first time, indeed, creation noiselessly sank into and through me its placid and untellable lesson . . . the visible suggestion of God in space and time." Realizing perhaps that in "Song of Myself" his vision of triumph over death had carried him beyond the limits of autobiography, in *Specimen Days* Whitman created an autobiography which managed to express, using somewhat more conventional forms, the same Transcendentalist vision of the self.

As an autobiographer, Henry Adams professed to be somewhat

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intimidated by the failure of other autobiographers to create self-images which were at once accurate and heroic. Indeed, the apparent impossibility of the task led Adams to think of the writing of autobiography as the literary equivalent of suicide. However, this did not mean that he was entirely opposed to it. Possibly, through some unconscious process, his literary suicide may have helped to relieve the emotional burden of the actual suicide of his wife—an event conspicuous by its omission from his autobiography. More consciously, he urged the writing of autobiography on friends as the only alternative to leaving the task to biographers, whom he regarded as literary assassins. Thus, far from being an act of despair and self-destruction, the composition of an autobiography represented, for Adams, a gesture of self-protection and self-assertion. Certainly, Adams committed his own literary suicide with great verve and supreme skill. With the simple gesture of adopting the third person point of view, Adams was able to treat himself as a biographer might—as though his life had ended. By characterizing himself as a failure, he could forestall criticism of his egotism while implicitly indicting a social system which excluded such a talented man from power. Thus, his pervasive irony is perhaps more self-serving than self-deprecatory. Clearly, the composition of the *Education* was a complex and highly charged act, and Adams may have found his greatest satisfaction and self-fulfillment in his literary self-annihilation.

In the narrative, Adams' most direct confrontation with death comes with his sister's premature and painful death from lockjaw. This incident probably acquired additional significance in the narrative from the fact that it served as an outlet for his unexpressed grief for the loss of his wife. At any rate, it had on Adams the effect the shipwreck had on Thoreau: it shocked him into a recognition that death could threaten his entire system of belief as well as his emotional stability. This event obliterated any vestige in him of a belief in a personal God. Furthermore, his witnessing of his sister's suffering brought into sharp focus his vision of nature as "a chaos of anarchic and purposeless forces"—an intuition he was to grapple with for the rest of his life.

Like Adams' point of view, the structure of the narrative also reflects his conception of autobiography as literary suicide, for he arbitrarily separated his "education," the material of the narrative, from his "life," which he confined to the twenty year period omitted from the book. The bipartite structure serves to contrast two

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phases of education—one passive and accidental, the other active and purposeful—but it also imitates the splintered quality of his life. Failure may have seemed a fate worse than death to an Adams, but by admitting to the failure of his education, Adams sought to protect both the success and failure of his life from public scrutiny. Thus, Adams closed the first section with his "failure" as a Harvard professor and then omitted both his personal achievements (as a historian) and his personal tragedy (as a husband) from the narrative. Then, as the narrative resumes with the year 1892, Adams portrays himself as a dead man struggling to adjust to his resurrection—fighting off the urge to return to the Orient "to sleep forever in the trade-winds under the southern stars," and trying to overcome the inertia of "drifting in the dead-waters of the *fin-de-siècle.*"

In fact, of course, Adams was a man of remarkable vitality, and the writing of *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* and the *Education* was a crucial accomplishment of this second phase of his life and education, for it was only in those books that Adams formulated, in the Dynamic Theory of History, an answer to the problem of death. While the implications of this theory are apocalyptic, it keeps open several possibilities for the future of man, and there is evidence that Adams prophesied disaster in the hope of provoking a response vigorous and economical enough to avert it. In any event, the theory served him as a useful fiction, for it struck an equilibrium between the chaotic forces of nature and the resilience and power of his own mind. Indeed, upon close examination of the theory, we find that in spite of his habitual self-deprecation, Adams put his own consciousness squarely at the center of his own cosmology. In a manner reminiscent of the Transcendentalists, his formula for the universe and his account of himself were aspects of the same vision.

The death of the individual and the death of the universe were connected in Adams' thought. Both forms of the dissipation of energy fascinated him, and he displayed at times the tendency of the spiritual autobiographer to anticipate the ultimate synthesis with a certain eagerness. However, he chose, in the end, to separate these elements. His Dynamic Theory was his own final intellectual synthesis; with that, his education ended. But his life and his autobiography continued. Unable to escape time, he slowed its passage in his narrative by covering less time per chapter, as if in defiance of his own Law of Acceleration. Knowing that his theory could be neither verified nor disproved in his lifetime, he began to

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contemplate the future with a new equanimity and prepared to assume his proper posthumous stance outside of history. In the final chapter, he approached the inevitable renunciation of life and selfhood with remarkable serenity.

Unable to include his own death in the narrative, he substituted for it the exemplary death of a friend, John Hay. Adams portrayed Hay as dying with a sense of accomplishment after having engineered a new international order. Because Adams had been involved, as an adviser, in Hay's success, his use of Hay's death is not entirely a gesture of deference. In addition, Hay was an appropriate surrogate because his diplomatic achievement was analogous to Adams' intellectual one. Unable, as a skeptic, to offer a vision of his sanctification in the manner of the spiritual autobiographer, Adams imagined his afterlife as a kind of posthumous education, to be accomplished by periodic returns to history with his friend Hay. In concluding, Adams dared to hope that they might someday discover "a world that sensitive and timid creatures could regard without a shudder." This final passage, though playful, is free from irony. Its optimism and the serenity of the final chapter surprise many readers, but they derive from an earned sense of triumph—both thematic and formal—over the forces of chaos and death.

Concern with death is probably more prominent in *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* than in any of the autobiographies discussed above. Within the first few paragraphs, Malcolm informs us that violent death had decimated his father's family and that he himself expects to die by violence. Perhaps the incident which most crucially shaped his entire life was the death of his father, who Malcolm believed was killed by white bigots enraged by his organizational work for Marcus Garvey. The removal of the head of the household resulted in the slow disintegration of the family, and the story of Malcolm's childhood and adolescence became one of growing alienation from the standards of the white society whose institutions, in his eyes, hastened the destruction of his family. After his escape from the midwestern society which thwarted his middle-class aspirations, Malcolm found illegitimate outlets for his ambition in the underworld of Roxbury and Harlem. Although this subculture seemed to provide an alternative to a fate like his father's, on the one hand, and a life of menial subservience, on the other, Malcolm's existence continued to be overshadowed by violence. In fact, his growing status and power in the underworld were accompanied by an increasing risk of a violent and sordid end.

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Drugs provided a temporary escape from the fear of death and the terrible irony of his life, but only his eventual arrest and imprisonment removed him from the escalating spiral of crime and violence.

A new but welcome irony characterized his life in prison; there he underwent the most liberating experience of his life—a complete conversion to the Black Muslim faith. "Laying dead" had been underworld slang for lying low; with Malcolm's conversion came the realization that he had been spiritually dead throughout his career as a hustler. He saw that his value system had been merely a cruel caricature of the white man's selfish economic individualism. Thus, Malcolm's conversion represented a double triumph; it rescued him from a suicidally dangerous life-style and accomplished his spiritual rebirth.

Malcolm's career as a Black Muslim minister was relatively free from violence and concern with death, but his excommunication from the Nation of Islam put his career, his sanity, and his life in danger all at once. His rejection from the church which had given him a new sense of identity challenged his emotional stability, and the continued jealousy of the orthodox posed a threat to him and his family. Unable quickly to resolve the paradoxes of his predicament, Malcolm often felt trapped and overwhelmed. But this new (and final) phase of his life proved to be one of rapid growth as Malcolm sought to refashion his ideology and his identity simultaneously. Although Malcolm had to juggle various new projects in his attempt to maintain religious authority and to establish a new power base, he did not abandon the writing of his autobiography in order to save them. Rather, as the threats against him escalated, he devoted more energy to the book, which he sensed would be the most reliable surrogate for him after his death.

Although he realized that his autobiography could not keep up with the danger in his life, he desperately wanted the book to record a second conversion, which occurred on a pilgrimage to Mecca and which gave him a new vision of race relations. In the expectation of death, Malcolm struggled to complete his self-development and his autobiography, and the last chapters acquire a moving sense of urgency from Malcolm's attempt to maximize the validity and authority of the book. His apprehension of a premature and violent death was reminiscent of his days as a hustler, but his courage was no longer drug-induced. Rather, it derived from his faith and his self-resignation. His assassination realized his prediction that he would not live to read the published autobiography, which was

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finished only through the work of his collaborator after his death. Thus, the circumstances of his death were such that his life and his autobiography very nearly ended simultaneously. The narrative acquires a certain symmetry from the conversion at its center and from the fact that its end recalled its beginning, for Malcolm, like his father, died a martyr's death. Although his death lay beyond the reach of the narrative, Malcolm accurately foreshadowed it, and our knowledge of the historical event inevitably and rightly informs our reading of the text. In a sense, the book's structure and meaning were completed by the assassination.

These autobiographers faced death differently. Eager for their eventual sanctification, Edward and Woolman seemed to welcome death. Franklin viewed it with curiosity and even complacency. Thoreau and Whitman looked to Nature for salvation from their sense of vulnerability. Stung by personal tragedy and afflicted by apocalyptic intuitions, Adams constructed intellectual battlements and loopholes of irony for his self-protection. And Malcolm X, living in the shadow of death, learned to see through it with a martyr's vision. None of the autobiographers have been unconcerned with death, and their expectations of it—whether fearful, resigned, or hopeful—have strongly influenced their narratives. To a surprising degree, then, the one event which eludes direct autobiographical treatment has proven to be a significant factor in the shaping of these autobiographies. In some way, each of these writers sought in his autobiography a solution to the problem posed by his mortality, and in that sense the composition of the autobiography has been a death-defying act.

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DINITIA SMITH

Magic

ROSE GREW UP HEARING STORIES about missed opportunity.

There was the story of her grandfather Eli who, in the 1860's, went West under the Homestead Act and settled on a hundred-sixty acres of prime farm land. But he soon grew bored with farming. He met up with a young man called Buffalo Bill; he forfeited his claim to his land (you had to stay sixteen months to get title), and left everything to follow Buffalo Bill all over the West. He became Buffalo Bill's road manager.

But after a while, Eli decided the young entertainer had no future, and he sold his contract with him to another man. Eli came back East and went to work in an amusement park. He made a good enough living at that, but forever after he brooded on Buffalo Bill, and on that land in the Dakotas, and on how he could have been rich and famous.

Eli had two children—Marcus and Ida. Ida was very beautiful. When she was eighteen-years-old, a son of one of the richest men in town fell in love with her and wanted to marry her. But Ida spurned him. She was in love with a banjo player who worked for her father, a man called Lawrence. She married Lawrence, and they were happy. Until one day a string broke on Lawrence's banjo. He never played again—a kind of depression seemed to overcome him, and it lasted for the rest of his life. Ida had to go out to work to support the family, and she too spent her life brooding, on the rich young man who had loved her, on her missed opportunity.

Marcus, Ida's brother, at the age of sixteen when it was time to go to work, received an offer from a cousin to join his pharmaceutical business in Albany. (There was one branch of the family that did not miss opportunities.) Marcus declined the offer. He had something better in mind—a plan that would make him rich. The railroad was coming in and a line was being built in the western part of the state. Everyone predicted a vast, new prosperity for the area. So Marcus decided to go there, to open a branch of the family business, an amusement park, and to catch the new trade. But Marcus didn't have the right kind of imagination to run an amusement park, and he borrowed too much money. The amusement

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park was not a success, and Marcus' family lived close to poverty. Marcus spent his life in worry and regret that he never took his cousin up on his offer to join him in the pharmaceutical trade.

Rose was Marcus' daughter. She was sixteen-years-old, tall, thin, with honey-colored hair and a fair skin. She grew up hearing all these stories, wondering if she too was fated to miss opportunities.

At night Rose lay in the high bed in her attic room, in the stifling heat (her mother wouldn't let her open the window, she said the night air carried disease), listening to the trains go by, watching through the lace curtains as the great white eye of the train lit up the sky—and dreamed of escaping. The trains were vessels of light in the darkness, where there was laughter, music, adventure, things to be learned, women in beautiful clothes and charming men, where no one knew you, where people did not gossip about every little thing you did. She imagined she heard voices coming from the interior of the trains, the clinking of glass.

Listening to the trains pass by, Rose wished she could take a trip somewhere—anywhere—not just because she was lonely, but also because she was curious. Unlike other girls, she'd been around many strangers, the performers who came to town to appear in her father's amusement park—the midgets, the fat ladies, the fire swallowers, the magnetic ladies, the ossified ladies, the terpsichoreans, the mysteriarchs and the acrobats. She had listened to them talking amongst themselves, and through them she had glimpsed other worlds.

But at the same time, the long whistle of the train echoing through the dark plain and off the mountainside suggested to her that the world out there was vast, lonely, foreboding, and Rose felt comfortable and secure, knowing that just on the other side of her bedroom wall, her parents lay together in their bed. Sometimes she could hear them whispering. They were lucky; whatever happened, they had each other to hold onto in the night, and they were never lonely.

Then one day, Rose's opportunity presented itself.

On the third of July, Marcus had to go down to the depot to pick up a magician he had booked into the park for the weekend, and Rose went with him in the wagon into town. As they drove the two miles down the dirt road, the land on either side of them was like an ocean, blue-green hills undulating into mountains. Day lilies, in shades of yellow and apricot, bobbed and waved at them, and yellow finches, no bigger than insects, flew out of the path of the

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horses. All along the road, nailed to the trees and fences, were the signs Marcus had printed up for the Fourth, advertising "Valatos, the Great Mysteriarch and Ichi Goochi, the Sensational Chinese Juggling Act, and the Terpsichorean Treats, and Dozens of Other Exciting Acts to Celebrate the Glorious Fourth."

Rose liked these rides because they lived so far away from everyone, and she was lonely. Riding along the road, they might run into someone, and at least she would see something other than the four walls of the house. She liked these rides because she could have her father to herself. At home he was quiet and moody, but driving along in the wagon, he would talk to her. She knew just how to draw him out—her mother wouldn't listen to him any more because he had disappointed her—he liked to talk about money and his latest scheme for getting rich. Not that she was yet interested in money—but she gleaned from these conversations other bits of information with which her father interspersed his disquisitions.

"This one gets a bigger percentage of the gate than the midgets or the ugliest woman," he was saying now, "I don't see where he has the right to it, but I have to give it to him. Everyone wants magicians now . . ."

She watched his face as he talked, wondered to what extent she resembled him—his eyes, the way a thick fold of skin covered the upper lids, his large, square forehead and jaw, family traits; his delicate skin that couldn't take the sun, and because of his age red and angry, but below the collar line, fair and delicate like her own. Sometimes his face seemed pale, tired, lifeless and she didn't want to look like him.

Watching him, she remembered being small and borne up by him, his whiskers scratching her cheeks in the cold air, how big he seemed, the tenderness that came from him. She loved him, and she wanted to protect him. She dreaded the time when he would grow old and become more and more the victim of his dreams. They would bury him.

They were passing the Schaeffer farm. Johnny Schaeffer was in the field, on the plow. Hearing hoofbeats on the road, he stopped, looked up and waved at them.

"Want to say hello?" Marcus asked.

"Please—no!"

She knew Johnny Schaeffer liked her; and that her father liked the Schaeffers because they were the richest farmers in the valley, and having neither money, solidity nor stability himself, he always

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envied it and admired it in others. But she did not like Johnny Schaeffer. She was repulsed by his large, undefined body, his thick, adolescent face. He was always teasing her—about her love for books—but she knew that underneath the sham of his mockery was a great mass of tenderness.

Her father knew she disliked Johnny Schaeffer, but he always wanted her to talk to him.

They drove on.

"Next year, when I get through school, can I go to Albany?" she asked.

"What do you want to do that for? What's in Albany?"

"Normal School."

"Normal School!"

"Yes."

"How are you going to pay for that, missy?"

"It's free—you know that."

"Nothing's free. What about your room and board—how will you pay for it then?"

"I'll stay with Bob and Eleanor—I'll work in the pharmacy at night to pay for my keep."

"That Eleanor's a loony—crazy! Three babies she's lost? You can't stay there. She doesn't want a young person in the house reminding her of everything."

"I could stay in a rooming house."

"Live by yourself? At sixteen-years-old. No sir!"

"But I can't stay here forever!"

"What's wrong—this town isn't good enough for you?"

"It's not that! I just want to—to see something of the world."

"The world's a bad place—what do you want to see the world for? Besides—your mother needs you."

She could feel the anger rise in him. They were headed for a fight which could end with him striking her, and with her in tears. She kept quiet. He might punish her by not letting her ride with him anymore—it was one of the few punishments he could think of—to deprive her of these rides.

She did not want to help her mother. When she thought of her mother, she always thought of her hands, raw, chapped, the skin serrated by constant chafing, the nails, thick, horn-like from continual immersion in water. It was her mother, though, who read to her when she was little, who insisted she stay in school, who always said, "What do you want to get married and have children for? It's

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too much hard work—you don't need it!" But she knew that when it came to her going off to Normal School, her mother would side with her father, each for his own reason afraid that she'd meet a man.

She wondered what this magician would look like. The magicians who worked the park were mostly rather shabby sorts, like Mr. Zoltan, with his dyed black hair and his pointed and waxed beard and moustache, or Mr. Wing Wong, tall, fair, an alcoholic midwesterner who wore Chinese make-up for his act.

The depot was crowded today. People were waiting for the one train a week from New York, and it was late. Rose and Marcus sat in the shade under a tree for an hour.

They heard the sound of the train in the distance. The crowd stopped all conversation, drew closer to the tracks in a wave of movement. There was the white headlight, the clatter of the wheels. Like a black beast, the train roared into the station, its great power held in check. It slowed to a halt. The crowd waited to see which door would be opened to let out the passengers.

"What does he look like?" Rose asked.

"All I know is he ain't Chinese."

A door opened. The passengers were climbing down onto the wooden platform. Rose recognized some of them—one of her teachers—and Mr. Schaeffer. Then a young man, dressed all in white, a white suit and shoes, and a panama hat, stepped down from the train. His eyes scanned the crowd. He was waiting for someone. There was another man behind him, a thin man with a wide moustache. Marcus pushed towards them.

"Hello," said the young man, "I'm Ray Valatos—my assistant Mr. Barker."

His accent struck her at once. It was different from any she'd ever heard, not the soft, round "r's" of this region, not the accent of the people who usually came up from New York, guttural, sometimes Eastern European or German. His voice was clear, modulated, resonant, as if he came from no particular country. The nearest inflections she'd heard to it were in the voices of the occasional actors whom her father booked into the park.

Valatos shook her hand, but didn't look at her. He glanced around him, took in the crowd.

She saw that the bones of his face were fine and delicate, and his skin was golden. His hair, a light brown, curled softly about his ears. His eyes were grey-green, oval, with fine, delicate eyelids. His

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body was slender and narrow and she noticed his hands, a piano player's hands with long, strong fingers. His clothes had not a single stain or blemish from the journey; the crease in his pants was sharp and perfect still. His white calf shoes were spotless.

As she climbed into the back of the wagon, she passed close to him, and she smelled the perfume of clean linen, of soap and starch and sunlight, and the sharp scent of cologne. For years after, whenever she smelled clean linen, she would think of him.

Three large trunks and a packing case accompanied them, and Marcus and Mr. Barker loaded them up on the wagon next to her. As they drove to the hotel the young man was silent. He looked out from the wagon, beyond the town. He seemed uncomfortable in the heat and dust, and Mr. Barker looked unhappy. At one point, Mr. Barker asked if there were any bars around, and Marcus said it was a dry town (Marcus was a teetotaler), and he looked even more unhappy. Marcus said that about two miles out of town there was a place to get a drink, but he would have to find a ride there. They drove the rest of the way without talking. At the hotel, they helped them unload, and Marcus made a few arrangements with Valatos about the time of the performance.

That night, in her high bed in the attic room, Rose did not sleep. She lay listening to the trains, and wondering about the young man, who he was, where he came from, what he was thinking about when he looked out over the fields.

The Fourth of July came and Rose stayed up in her room with the door shut. She put up her hair—it suited her more that way, framing her face nicely, de-emphasizing the strong, square jaw, and her broad forehead. Putting her hair up made her face more delicate and oval. She wore her white cotton dress, and a white straw hat with silk ribbons and flowers trailing from it—her church outfit.

Then she came quietly down the stairs, and, unseen by her mother, slipped out the back door. She set off down the road to the amusement park.

When she arrived, the park was already crowded. She slipped in at the gate, in the middle of a group of people, avoiding her father. As she passed him, she didn't look at him—that way he wouldn't notice her. He didn't like her to hang around the park, and he wouldn't let her run rides or sell tickets.

The crowd pressed against her. She smelled perfume and hair oil, everyone clean and in their best clothes. She smelled smoke, pret-

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zels roasting, chicken cooking. She smelled sugar, cotton candy, caramel apples. And there was music, the calliope, and the strains of a flute. It was Mr. Hellman, the postmaster, oblivious to the crowd, his body rocking back and forth to the Mozart—he was hitting all the wrong notes. Mr. Hellman wanted more than anything else to be a musician, and every year he asked her father to let him play, and every year Marcus agreed, because he played for free.

She passed the ferris wheel, and the merry-go-round. She watched the children riding round and round on the wooden horses, holding out their hands against the wind, while the air was filled with their screams.

There was the Tunnel of Grotesqueries—a sign invited "Come see the ugliest woman in the world! Only five cents!" Once Rose had seen her—a huge birth defect blotted her face, a kind of mouth that grew inside out, heavy with blood vessels. Rose had dreamed about the woman, and she had screamed in her sleep. Marcus woke her up, held her until she stopped crying. He assured Rose that the woman had a handsome husband, and a son, and except for her face, she was perfectly normal in every way and led a happy life.

Another sign advertised the biggest horse in the world—you could see it too for five cents. Next to the horse was another tent where a young girl, the Princess Zaza, was changed into a gorilla right in front of your eyes. Next to that was a big tank filled with water which held "the biggest lobster in captivity, one hundred years old and weighing thirty-five pounds—only a nickel!" Rose wondered what would happen to the family that owned the lobster when the lobster finally died. That was all the family had in the world. The lobster was their sole source of income, and the family spent their lives traveling from fair to fair, showing him off to people for a nickel.

There was a good gate today. But Rose knew this wouldn't necessarily make Marcus happy. He was always suspicious of good fortune—he'd worry that a good crowd today meant the rest of the summer would be bad.

There was Johnny Schaeffer, dressed in a high, stiff collar, his face red in the heat. She thought he looked silly. He was watching the crowd. She knew he was looking for her. She avoided him.

The light was turning pink now, and beyond the park the sun was going down into the mountains. Clouds, feathers of pink and silver, floated over the smokey plain. In the midst of this vast and

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silent expanse was the enclosure of the park, resounding with voices and music, surrounded by the high wood fence, rimmed with barbed wire. And Rose, looking out towards the mountains, felt safe in the crowd, inside the enclosure.

She was hungry. She bought a piece of chicken and a raspberry soda, and sat down near the big tent to eat. The tent was painted in red, white and blue stripes, and she could hear the band inside warming up for the evening's entertainment. They were playing snatches of "Rosie O'Grady" and "Sidewalks of New York." The crowd heard the music and started drifting towards it.

The band struck up "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Rose slipped inside the tent. She stood in the shadows at the edge of the stage, hidden.

"Ladiesangenelmen!" It was Sherwood, the announcer, who worked for Marcus every summer. "Welcome! Welcome! Welcome! To our special entertainment on this the Glorious Fourth, the greatest acts in the whole world brought here especially for *you*! Tonight the magnificent Valatos will perform feats never before seen by human eyes! But first, ladies and gentlemen, a special treat for your health! We have here tonight a special guest—the world-famous Doctor William Herbert Hargrave with his miraculous elixir—Ladies and gentlemen, this wonderful potion cures cancer—carbuncles—the common cold! You *name* it! Please welcome Doctor Hargrave!"

And so the entertainment began, but she hardly noticed any of it—the pale figure of Dr. Hargrave exhorting the audience to buy his famous patent medicine, with quotes in the original from Homer, Vergil, Sir Thomas Browne, and, sitting at the foot of the stage, his Indian assistant, Chief Willimantic, dressed in full war regalia and nodding silent affirmation of the healing powers of the wonderful elixir. Two men from the audience were coming forward to buy the little blue bottles—Marcus had planted them—he was getting a cut on every bottle.

Then came the midgets—the same tumbling routine year after year, the same comedy sketch with a full-sized actor who was pompous and tormented them. But they always got the better of him in the end. The audience clapped and cheered.

Now the Terpsichoreans, five women, no longer young, dressed in Greek togas, dancing to the music of a harp, weaving in and out in a chain and holding on to a long garland of flowers. The audience hooted.

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And the Chinese juggling act. An old Chinaman, hair in a pigtail and dressed in silk pajamas, with his grandson, a youth of twenty. They bowed, then did a couple of somersaults. The old man balanced his grandson at the end of a twelve-foot pole. He held it in the palm of his hand while the boy floated high above the crowd. The old man seemed almost to be falling asleep as, for a full five minutes, he held the boy suspended in mid-air. His boredom communicated itself to the audience. They were moving in their seats. The old man released his grandson.

Next the fire-eaters—Negroes in grass skirts, dancing in circles to a drum beat and bearing torches from which they gulped down great mouthfuls of flame. The applause was desultory.

"*Ladies and gentlemen—let us welcome that great Mysteriarch,* the sensation of Europe and Russia, that Supreme Escape Artist of them All, Valatos—the Magnificent!"

He sprang onto the stage, arms outstretched, and bowed to the audience from the waist. He moved like a dancer, never seemed to walk, but always to jump, to leap, to run, as if a steel wire ran right down through his body, suspending him inches above the floor of the stage. He was all in white, around his neck a long silk scarf that reached almost to the ground. In the shadows behind him stood Barker, his assistant, watching him, holding the props.

First he made a whole egg appear from inside an empty red, felt bag. Then he untied the white silk scarf from his neck, pulled it through a long hollow tube and transformed it into radiant shades of blue and red and gold. He touched his magic wand to the buttonhole of his jacket, and brought forth a perfect, red rose. From the flame of a lighted candle he produced another white silk scarf, and after each of these feats, he bowed.

A drum roll. "The special, high point of the night," cried Sherwood, "Mr. Valatos will perform one of his daring escape acts. For his first, incredible, feat, he challenges anyone from the audience to produce a pair of handcuffs, in perfect working order, mind you, from which he *guarantees* to escape in a matter of minutes!"

"We've got some here—try these!" A voice from the back. It was Constable Kelly. He was waving a pair of handcuffs in the air. He pushed through the audience to the stage. He handed the cuffs up to Valatos, who took them, examined them, tried the key in the lock and gave them back to Kelly. Kelly locked the cuffs tight around Valatos' wrists. He held the key up for all to see. The audience clapped and cheered. Now Barker drew a black velvet screen

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around Valatos. The band played—faster and faster. Thirteen minutes passed. Suddenly, the screen was swept aside. There stood Valatos, holding both arms up high, free. In one hand he dangled the cuffs, which were unlocked. The audience cheered. Valatos bowed. He did not smile, but stared straight into the crowd, eyes unblinking.

Now he was upping the ante. Sherwood was challenging anyone from the audience to tie Valatos to a chair with sixty feet of strong rope, and Valatos would escape—without even cutting the rope—in fifteen minutes he would be free. Sherwood called for volunteers.

A girl Rose knew from school was being dragged to the front of the tent by two giggling friends. But as the girl looked into Valatos' face, she grew serious. She wound the rope around his neck, his chest, his arms, his hands, his whole body. When she finished, she went back, giggling, to her seat.

Once more Barker drew the screen around Valatos. Once more the band played, and the minutes passed. Again the screen was swept aside and Valatos was free again, the rope intact and coiled at his feet.

"More! More!" the audience rose and shouted at the stage.

But Valatos—he disdained them, bowing only in cold politeness, maniacal in his determination, burdened with this awful necessity, to be transfigured, to undergo this perpetual ritual of escape from perpetual entanglement, forever in danger, forever free—Valatos, stab of white light in the darkness, poet of escape, angel!

She, standing in the wings, never took her eyes from him, from the quicksilver body, the marvelous hands, double-jointed, dexterous, the face set in concentration, a fine sweat curling the brown hair. She was not entertained by him. She was watching out for him.

As the night burned itself out, he escaped from a straitjacket; blindfolded, from a wooden packing crate locked with iron locks and tied with heavy rope; and then, as a kind of grand finale, from a wooden cistern filled with water, the lid padlocked and bound with rope, and behold!—when they thought he had drowned, he reappeared—Lazarus!—at the back of the tent, immaculate and dry.

Rose had never seen an audience like this. She could feel the heat of their bodies. From the shadows by the stage, she watched him. Valatos—he had a human body—just like them—but he could do the impossible. He could produce rabbits and roses out of nothing.

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He could change matter into spirit, spirit into matter. Most important of all he could get *out*. He could escape! And the audience, hot and shouting, they fixed their dreams on him, on his shining white body, this slender and beautiful young man.

But they had also come to see him fail, they had come to see him make a fool of himself. They wanted to witness his humiliation. Then he would be just like them—mediocre, always dreaming and always failing. He would bear the punishment for all of them who yearned for the impossible, who dreamed of getting out. He would bear the punishment for their pride.

He bowed. This time the applause shook the canvas tent. A thunder of approval spread out across the soft night. From her place at the edge of the stage, she could see his legs and arms trembling in exhaustion, his face white with strain, the black arcs around his eyes. She wanted to soothe him, to nurse him.

Now a young girl reappeared on the stage, the one who had tied him to the chair. She was carrying a bouquet of daisies, arranged in a design of two giant handcuffs (planned in advance of Valatos' visit by Marcus). She presented the flowers to him. He accepted, bowed one last time, and disappeared behind the stage.

The band played the Star-Spangled Banner, the audience stood at attention, hands on their breasts, faces liquid with sweat.

The music over, they filed out of the tent.

Rose waited.

A burst of firecrackers. She saw through the open door of the tent the sky awash in a waterfall of light, ribbons of red, white and blue, and gold and silver, diamonds and sapphires raining down on the crowd, which was silhouetted against the illumined sky and then flickering out into the ocean of black. For half an hour it lasted, and then there was silence.

The performers were leaving now. One of the midgets passed close to her. He was combing his hair. She heard the soft chirping of his voice in the dark. He wanted to know where he could get something to eat. He took the arm of a female midget, a full-breasted creature dressed in a trim blue suit.

Now she heard the grating of the big gate as it was opened to allow the last of them to leave. She heard the chain clanking, the lock being snapped shut. The soft voices faded. Somewhere in the distance, a screen door banged.

She heard the sound of someone washing.

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She came out of her hiding place, and went behind the stage. He was standing in a pool of yellow light, naked from the waist up, bathing the cuts and scrapes which riddled his whole body. He dabbed at himself with a washcloth, winced. She saw his chest—a boy's chest, thin, but strong.

His body was raw and bruised. She watched as he wiped himself with an ointment. Then he put on a clean, white shirt, tied a clean, white, silk scarf around his neck. He studied his face in a shard of mirror propped up on a packing case and combed the hair away from his face.

When he had finished, he sat down on a wooden crate at the door of the tent, looking out at the night. The jagged edge of the fence stood out against the dark silver sky. Suspended above them, the cold moon stared. It was clear tonight. The stars blinked, left a liquid trail across the dome of the sky. And on the ground below, the fireflies mirrored the stars and the crickets sang in the shadows.

She was afraid he'd turn suddenly and catch sight of her. Preparing for this, she rubbed her cheeks with her hands to make them red. Flushed cheeks made her eyes seem to shine.

He must have caught her movement out of the corner of his eye because he turned suddenly.

Seeing her, he smiled, a polite smile.

"Well," he said, "Good evening. Thought I was the only one left."

She came forward, into the light.

"Shouldn't you be home in bed?"

"It's o.k."

She sat down next to him, and together they watched the darkness. She didn't say anything. She knew he was preoccupied, and besides, she was afraid. All the rides were quiet now. A horse on the carousel reared up against the moon, forelegs drawn back to its arched neck. How anguished its face was, now that it was still like that and there was no music, with its jaw pulled back, the lips curling in fear and rage, its energy captive, frozen, enchanted. The horses on the carousel were not beautiful, they were not sweet. It was as if someone had played a trick, the man who carved them, he had shown what it was like to be a captive, a prisoner, and no one noticed, not the children, riding round and round the carousel, pulling at the flesh of their lips.

"Look at those fireflies," he reached out, catching one in his

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hands. He watched it through the crack between his palms, then released it, beaming into the night.

She saw that his wrists were badly cut.

"Your hands!" she exclaimed.

He glanced at them. "It's the price. Did you like the show? Went o.k., didn't it?"

"Oh yes. How did you do all those things?"

"I'll never tell," he smiled.

She admired him. She always admired people who could keep secrets. Maybe she was someone who could never keep a secret—because a secret was about all she had to give away.

"It looked like real magic," she said.

"Just craft—and hard work."

His eyes seemed to glaze over. He looked out. He had forgotten her. A breeze came in the tent from the field, carried the smell of him towards her, the perfume of his clean linens.

"It was a good gate," he said, "I hope your old man doesn't try to cheat me. You know, a lot of good performers won't come up here. He has a reputation, your father does, for cheating people."

Rose didn't answer. But she was hurt. She knew he was right about her father. There were other things she'd heard from other performers, remarks her father himself had made, that made her know he sometimes cheated people. She hurt for her father, that they didn't like him. She was ashamed. But she loved him, she was his own flesh. But did that mean she was like him?

Valatos reached into his pocket, took out a small, silver flask. He unscrewed the top, sipped from it, and handed it to her.

She shook her head.

"I only drink after a performance," he said, "I've got to unwind. I hate these towns—dead!" He looked at her. "It's nice to have someone to talk to—sure you won't get in trouble being out so late?"

"I'll be fine."

She was sitting next to him as if she were posing in front of a mirror, conscious of the set of her mouth, the way her hands were folded neatly in her lap, and her knees pressed daintily together. She didn't want to look lanky and awkward. She had sat down with her left side deliberately towards him, her left side being her prettiest. It was because of the way her hair was parted when she was a child. One side of her hair fell on her face in a soft wave, while

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the other side showed off too much forehead. There were times when, studying herself in the mirror, she knew she was pretty. Her face seemed doll-like, with its delicate nose, and full, wide lips. But at other times, the square jaw and her large forehead seemed too strong, too intelligent. It was as if there were two faces growing out of the same body, coming alternately into focus: one delicate and luminous, the other strong and tired.

She knew that they would be looking for her now. Her father was even at this moment working himself up into a rage. It didn't matter. She wouldn't see him until tomorrow. He wouldn't think to look for her here.

Valatos reached over suddenly, slapped her arm. He bought his hand away, a mosquito squashed on his finger.

"It's hot! I can't believe these towns. It must be awful living here. You know, I never understand why people say it's nice living in the country. You must get lonely . . ."

She nodded.

"There's not much to do. Do you like to read?"

She thought carefully before she answered, composing herself, modulating her voice so that she would sound older than she really was.

"Yes."

"And school—do you like school?"

"Yes."

"What subjects do you like in school?"

"Latin—we have a Latin banquet every year. Next year I get to go because I have ten credits in it . . ."

"I quit in the seventh grade. Had to go to work."

"Where do you come from?" she asked.

"New York. But I was born in Russia. I came here when I was two. Imagine! All the way from Russia to this little town—and here I met you!" He smiled, and she noticed his white teeth.

He told her about New York, how dirty it was, but he loved it anyway. He told her about his father who was a very religious man who repaired the Torah, and his mother to whom he was particularly close. They were poor, and every week he sent home to his parents part of the money he earned.

"When you come to New York, you'll have to meet them. I'll show you around."

He would take her around the City, both of them dressed in their

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whites, she touching his arm lightly as they walked. She'd be his helper. He'd give her books to read. She would be surrounded by his aura, the perfume of his clean linens. She would have the privilege of looking after him every day, content merely to live her life in his presence. But did he mean it? Would he really take her to meet his parents? Why should he say that now?

"How old are you, anyway?" he asked.

"Eighteen," she lied.

"You look twelve."

He must have seen her hurt. "Come on—you're very pretty," he said.

He took her hand, gazed at it.

"Your hand's rough," he said.

"I know it." She pulled the hand away.

"Don't," he said, "It's good. It's only hard work." She studied his hand, the perfect white half moon of his cuticle, the nails ending in a curve at the fingertips.

"Your hands are strong," she said.

"Have to be. With this act you have to be in top physical condition. I used to work in a gym before I got into this. I learned to keep myself in shape."

She listened to him, and as he talked she wondered at the fact that she was actually sitting close to him now. So strange, thinking of him all these hours, obsessed by him, imagining him, and now he was there, inches from her.

She watched his face, his neck, there was a delicate crease in the golden skin, a luster, a gleam of youth and health. So close to him, yet she felt as if she had no body, no self, and that all this talk was just time passing, time being burned away until he would reach out to her and pull her towards him, hold her. She began to feel her body fill up, choking with anticipation, with tears. In his thin body was all knowledge; everything about him fascinated her, the thin arms, sinew, muscle, the lick of hair on his cheek, hold me, she begged, hold me, please . . .

"You said you liked Latin," he was saying.

She nodded.

"Did you have Catullus? Do you know the one he wrote to his sweetheart, to Lesbia? 'Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus, rumoresque senum severiorum, omnes unius aestimemus assis. . . .' " He was watching her face as he spoke.

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"Do you know what it means?" he asked.

"I think so."

He made love to her inside the tent.

Shades and folds of canvas, darkness, and no sound but the rustle of his clothing, and the electric thinness of his body moving up and down against the darkness, and the sweet smell—and she was crying, but he didn't know it, the tears were washing down her face, but his head was over her shoulder and in his excitement he brushed against her cheek with his own and he must have thought her tears were sweat. She did not concentrate on the sensations in her body. She did not experience ecstasy, that would come later when she remembered this. It was the transitory experience of being close to him, trying to keep him there, knowing in minutes it would be all over, this was real and not real, waiting the whole time for it to be over because it had to be over and this was what it was, about being over, and his not being there. In a way it wasn't now that even mattered, there was only the time to come when he would be gone, and she would have to imagine this. But she knew that for him the time was now, the five minutes it took every part of his thin body concentrated on it, how intense he was, and in a sense, she was not even there, and was outside it all. She was letting him do it to her. She was holding him as she would have held a child—she was protecting him.

He did it with elegance, with style, with formalized consideration, ritualized concern, as if he were reciting the poem to her.

When it was over, she heard him whispering to her, "What a sweet, lovely child you are. Are you o.k.?"

She nodded. "I wish I could take you with me," he said, "but the road's not the place for a girl like you."

She looked up at him, her eyes begging to tell him that it didn't matter. She wanted to go with him anywhere. Did he understand her?

He ran his hand along her cheek, "Anyway, your father would shoot me."

He drew her closer. "One day you'll visit me in the City. I'll leave you the address."

She smelled his hair and his skin. She touched his face, thinking, as her fingers moved across his cheek, that she wanted to remember exactly how he felt, so that later, at home, when she lay in her bed,

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she would remake him. She would recreate his body with her imagination, make him be with her in the high bed. And they would go through all the stations of life, betrothal, marriage, the birth of children, old age, death. He sat up, looked out, away from her, silent for a moment.

"I'm thirty-years-old, twice your age . . . I want to tell you a secret . . . There are so many things I want to do . . . things no other magician has ever done," he said.

"Tell me," she said, only wanting to hear the sound of his voice, the words falling against the night.

If he told her a secret, then, in a sense, he would belong to her, something of his would be left behind. She felt a coolness where the night air brushed against the sweat of her body.

"One day," he said, "I'm going to climb to the top of the tallest building in New York City . . . They tie my hands and legs together, see, with forty feet of rope. I'm wearing a parachute, strapped to my body. They push me off the building. As I fall down towards the earth, I untie myself. I free myself and open the chute and I land at the bottom on my feet!" He was talking rapidly, his eyes shining.

"I have another one!" he said. "They nail me into a trunk, I have handcuffs on my arms and legs. They take this trunk and they throw me off the bridge into the Hudson River, hundreds and hundreds of feet down into the water! Then, just as everyone thinks I'm smashed to pieces, I come walking out of the trees along the bank of the river, dry and dressed in all my clothes! I've been studying the river current. I think it can be done. I need time, though, to work on it. I have to do all these engagements to earn the money—it's expensive."

He sat forward, his fist clenched tight. He turned to her, "One day you'll get out of here."

"Why do you say that?"

"I know—you're not like them. It's late," he said. He stood up, held out his hand and pulled her up beside him. "I don't want you to get in trouble. I'll walk you home."

She thought: he has no idea the trouble I am in.

Her white dress was covered with earth stains. There was no way of keeping it from them. She brushed at the stains with her hand, but they wouldn't come off.

"He'll kill me," she said. She thought of Marcus' anger, quiet at

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first; you had to watch him carefully. He might look away, continue what he was doing. Then, suddenly, he'd turn, strike her, knock her across the room. Her face was burning at the thought of it.

Valatos took her hand and led her out of the tent. How dry the palm of his hand was, papery and firm. He pulled her close to him.

She pretended they were simply friends, going for a walk in the night.

The ground was littered with candy wrappers and yellow admissions tickets, an old ice-cream cone, a straw hat someone had left behind. She could smell the odor of rotting food coming from a garbage can.

And all around the fence, the barbed wire scratched at the silver sky.

Valatos went up to the wooden gate. He pulled at it, shook it. It was locked.

"Damn it!" he cried. She realized that until now, they had been whispering.

"What's the matter?"

"It's locked—we can't get out!"

"We could climb—"

"Don't be a fool!" He had called her a fool. "Is this the only gate?"

"Yes."

He was running around the base of the fence. She stumbled after him, wanting to be helpful. He shook the fence, kicked it. She followed his white body through the shadows.

"Goddammit!" he yelled.

"My father wanted to make sure no one could get in," she said. "The kids were coming in at night and wrecking everything!"

Why was he in such a hurry to leave? *She* was the one who was going to get it. She wished he didn't care—that he'd forget about her father. She wanted him to be so lost in her that he would forget about the time. They could spend the whole night together. They would sleep under a piece of canvas—that was all they needed for shelter. He had gone this far—another few hours didn't matter. Anyway, it wouldn't make what was going to happen to her any worse or better.

"I can't afford to spend the night in jail for sleeping with a sixteen-year-old."

His face was red. A fine blue vein stood out on his cheek. He rattled the gate again.

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Now she stood apart from him, watching him.

She began to feel, growing inside her very slowly, a certain dislike. He seemed suddenly very far away.

"You mean," she said, "you can't get out?"

He glared at her.

She sat down. The ground was damp. She pulled up a stem of grass, bit on the sweet, tender tip of it, and watched him run around the fence, waiting for someone to come and let them out.

Vishnu, incarnate as a fish, rescues the four Vedas, texts sacred to Hinduism
Central India, Malwa circa 1650
8 x 5¾ inches

ART
OF
SOUTHEAST ASIA

DORIS WIENER
41 EAST 57th STREET
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FRAWLEY BECKER

The Quality of Unmercy

It was Mrs. Upsall's ninetieth birthday and several of the residents of *Beau Manoir* had been invited to attend a small party honoring her. The old woman was the mother-in-law of Richard H. Potts, the manager of a three-building apartment complex just east of Western Avenue in Hollywood, and there was no question of those few, selected tenants not attending. Not unless they wanted their leaky faucets to drip forever.

Of the three buildings, two were weevil- and roach-ridden and all were in need of paint. The outside walls were worn, and held warped screens that wouldn't fit, no matter how you fiddled with them. *Beau Manoir* was written in sprawling, once-gilded letters across a shabby, weather-beaten facade which, for the most part, the inhabitants matched. All down the block and the next and the one after that, the fading stucco surfaces of Hollywood apartment buildings rose with equally incongruous Gallic names—*L'Etoile, Mon Rêve*, and even *Belle Vie*. Unpaid promises in tarnished letters, all of them.

Colin MacCauley was one of the tenants at *Beau Manoir* whom manager Potts had invited. MacCauley resided alone in a studio apartment ($105 a month) and though he called himself an Advertising Copywriter, he more often than not juggled a part-time salary from Manpower (filing and light typing, $2.90 an hour) along with food stamps. It was the kind of juggling everyone in Hollywood did, especially if you called yourself something other than what you were. Each month he scraped together just enough to pay the rent. MacCauley was a college graduate, a rarity for that part of town, and he certainly deserved better; but since he didn't seem to believe he could ever attain whatever better was, he made little effort to change either himself or his environment. His Manpower checks were late, computer errors were made, and jobs were invariably snatched from under his nose. A latter-day Miniver Cheevy, MacCauley shrugged, called it the way of the world, and went on making impecunious ends meet.

He economized by preparing his own food, and allowed only one exception to his rigid budget—he would often take over to the Potts

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apartment the remains of some homemade soup for Mrs. Upsall. Sometimes the fragile old lady would be sitting on the porch with her nursemaid (three afternoons a week, $2.75 an hour by special arrangement) when MacCauley came by. The overhanging porch roof shaded the two women like an immense parasol, protecting them from the early fires of February. Startled from their lethargy, the women would blink when he suddenly appeared against the stark, dazzling pavement. Their eyes would follow his path hypnotically across the front lawn the way they might have followed the flight of a nervous California bluejay. Then the nursemaid would adjust her mahogany-colored wig, lean into Mrs. Upsall and shout on a breath of vodka that that nice Mr. MacCauley was bringing her something to eat. The nursemaid always shouted, even when Mrs. Upsall had her hearing aids plugged in, because the old woman was inclined to be adrift early in the afternoon when the weight of lunch and the blaze of sun dulled her senses. She would nod at the "bringing you," which she grasped immediately, and then wonder whom her companion was talking about. Only when the young man had burst from the apartment through the dingy French windows and onto the porch and stood smiling from ear to ear, holding a jar of some mysterious treat in his hands, did she remember quite definitely that, yes, this gentleman did bring her good things to eat. Beatrice Potts would stand next to MacCauley on these occasions, beaming in like fashion, looking down on her mother as if some remarkably articulate speech of acknowledgment could flow from the dry, wrinkled mouth.

"Look what Mr. MacCauley brought you, mama!" Mrs. Potts would say, and wait for the old woman to focus on what was directly in front of her.

"You remember Mr. MacCauley, don't you, dear?" asked the nursemaid loudly, running a hand over her uniform pocket and the reassuring flask of cheap vodka she always kept there.

"Yes, yes!" Mrs. Upsall would say, her voice both gravelly and giddy. Then came a stream of dry thank you's and an accompanying head bob from the old woman, and Mrs. Potts's eyes would go moist with joy. Colin MacCauley would thrust the jar he was holding into Mrs. Upsall's spidery hands, and since the young man basically had nothing to say to anyone there, he would execute a ceremonious half-bow and dart off as rapidly as he had come. Three pairs of eyes would follow the return trip across lawn and sidewalk, then turn in unison and in anticipation to the wonderful, still warm container that Mrs. Upsall held clamped like a vise.

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The birthday party had been announced for four o'clock, an hour of celebration generally reserved for the young. Mrs. Potts remembered all the birthday parties she'd had when she was a little girl—after-school gatherings Mrs. Upsall had organized for *her*—and thought, without mockery, that that hour was most appropriate to honor her mother's ninth decade. The time, in fact, was perfect for Mrs. Upsall's aged friends and the idle tenants of *Beau Manoir*, all of whom were suddenly given something to do in the middle of the afternoon. Mrs. Potts was inclined to be forgetful, so upon her insistence manager Potts invited everyone a second time, just to make sure. His memory was better than hers and she would chide him and say it was because he was more than twenty years her junior. A smug smile would creep across his face at those moments. It was a misplaced smugness, for his appearance actually belied their age difference. At forty, Potts was thin, sallow-complected, and had deep lines that twisted like canyons through the contours of his cheeks and brow. They were the lines of accelerated living in the motorcycle cult of the late Fifties and as far into the Sixties as he could project it. Alcohol and anger had marred his face with the same vengeance that he and his fellow bikers had once marred the face of a young motor patrolman who had dared tell the three-lane group that not all of Pacific Coast Highway belonged to them. Apartment managers in Hollywood are made of such material. Their former addresses are Chino and San Quentin. Their faces and bodies collapse long before their dreams do. Seagram's and Smirnoff and any bad Tokay on sale hasten the decline, and with the manager of *Beau Manoir* and his wife it had been no different. For years after their marriage, the Pottses had sat around in indecision, their only reality a glass of something, anything, in hand. They hesitated between bathrobe and street clothes, between morning drink and mid-morning drink, between forgetfulness and oblivion. Then when their bodies were totally saturated, when their undergarments smelled of yeast and their pores could exude nothing but the sour sweat of beer, when a pinprick to the skin would have turned them into the spouting fountains of Rome, when a single shot glass more would have killed them, they stopped. Abruptly. Completely. Without Alcoholics Anonymous and without antabuse. Simply because, on a fortuitous stumble in their living room, they came across their reflections in the mirror and saw themselves leaden with death, their faces bled as if by leeches, their bodies wrapped in grizzled cerements. Perhaps it was a mo-

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ment of alcoholic hallucination, perhaps it was a look into the rapidly approaching future. It didn't matter, the presage was there. The couple screamed with one voice, fell to their knees, and Mrs. Potts prayed while her husband wept. Bottles were thrown out. Bodies were washed. Windows were opened. Then suddenly deprived of his supports, with no glass to clutch and no bike pedal to stand on, Richard H. Potts converted his lifelong drinking habit to coffee, and from that day on was never seen without a steaming cup, usually white plastic, in his hand. He hunted down a job and got one, managing *Beau Manoir*. Beatrice Potts bought Maybelline at Thrifty's, smiled sweetly at everyone she saw, and remembered she had a mother living alone in Roanoke. And why couldn't she join them in Hollywood? In a society based on puritanical pudency, every plunge into pleasure must have its counterplunge in payment. And so Nescafé and old Mrs. Upsall became the crosses Richard H. and Beatrice Potts had sought for years to bear.

At a few minutes past four of the appointed day, Colin MacCauley arrived at the Potts door holding a two-quart jar of creamed leek and potato soup. He was greeted by manager Potts with a cup, china for a change, in his hand. He immediately ushered the young man into a living room congested with elderly bodies and led him up to his mother-in-law, who was seated like a sovereign in the only comfortable chair in the room.

MacCauley almost recoiled at the sight. Mrs. Upsall had been made up for the great occasion like some precocious movie moppet. Her hair had been bleached to a saintly shade of whiteness. Two long hanks were braided and frizzled out at the ends like excelsior on her shoulder. Her pallid eyelids had been painted opalescent white and on her sunken cheeks smudges of bright rouge stuck out in Petrouchka patches. On top of her head a red satin bow had been perched in absolute sobriety. Flanking the old lady were Mrs. Bryant-Armitage, the most senior resident of *Beau Manoir,* and the bibulous nursemaid in her mahogany-colored wig. The two women sat imperiously like temple guards protecting their sacred idol. Suddenly the room became hushed and MacCauley felt everyone's eyes on him. He wondered if he should kneel.

"This is for you, Mrs. Upsall," he said, extending the two-quart jar of soup to the old lady whose flaccid arms did not move and whose hands lay still in her lap. "Many happy returns of the day."

"Doesn't mama look wonderful?" Mrs. Potts asked, stepping up to the young man. "You'd never guess she was ninety, would you?"

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"Doesn't look a day over seventy!" Mrs. Bryant-Armitage chimed in, reaching for the jar with hands that bore nails over an inch long, startlingly red and startlingly bright for a woman of her years.

She brought the container right up to Mrs. Upsall's face while the nursemaid shouted, "Look what *we've* got, dear! Isn't that lovely?"

MacCauley noticed that Mrs. Upsall's gaze did not focus. At least it was not focussed on him or the jar, although her head was oriented in his direction. She was smiling almost beatifically, without seeing him. MacCauley turned around to make sure there was nothing else Mrs. Upsall could be staring at, but all he saw were a dozen wizened faces, all watching him with the same approving smile. He turned back and once more observed the old lady whose stillness and gaudy cosmetics reminded him of a painted wooden Russian doll—the kind that contains, seemingly *ad infinitum,* a series of smaller wooden dolls inside. He wondered if there were other old ladies inside the one before him. The outermost Mrs. Upsall appeared catatonic. He leaned into Mrs. Potts and whispered, "Is she . . . ? I mean, is she all right?"

"Oh, dear me, yes! Mama's fine! It's just the emotion, that's all!" Then Mrs. Potts grabbed the jar eagerly from Mrs. Bryant-Armitage and said, "Thank you, Mr. MacCauley. Mama just *loves* your soup! I'll put it in the fridge right away!" And she bounced off gaily toward the kitchen. MacCauley noticed that when Mrs. Potts got to the threshold of the room, Mrs. Upsall's eyes turned and seemed to follow her daughter—or was it the creamed leek and potato soup? It was the only movement of any kind the old woman had made since MacCauley had arrived. Then her eyes returned to whatever it was in front of her that preoccupied her, and went out of focus.

MacCauley's homage over, people stirred on their chairs and picked up the snips of conversation they had previously dropped. MacCauley hesitated a moment, not knowing where to put himself, until Potts came out of the kitchen carrying high in the air one of those plastic-seated chrome chairs so abundant in "furnished" Hollywood apartments. He made a place for MacCauley next to Mrs. Mattesich, the owner of *Beau Manoir*. She was a colorless, dough-faced woman in her middle years who looked like a Grant Wood painting, the look being accentuated by thin lips which she held as tight as her purse strings. She owned several pieces of

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property in the east end of Hollywood, all of them apartment units, all of them run down. Screens warped, paint peeled, and pipes spurted, but money never went *out* of her account, only in. She and MacCauley exchanged polite howdyado's, and Potts placed a steaming plastic cup of coffee into the young man's hand. Then the manager pulled up his own chair alongside, settled his sinewy, former biker's body in next to him, and leaned in confidentially. "I'm sure as hell glad we didn't put her in a retirement center," he said with a slight nod in Mrs. Upsall's direction. "Bea and me discussed it a year ago, you know, and well—we just couldn't do it."

Mrs. Mattesich overheard the remark and turned around. "If you do decide to go that way," she said, a little too loudly and stressing the *that way,* "let me know. I'll put you in a smaller apartment and rent out this two-bedroom." Potts gave her a steely look, nodded wordlessly, and Mrs. Mattesich turned her attention back to the cup of tepid tea and half-eaten Triscuit she held in her lap.

"Anyway," continued Potts, "I'm glad we didn't. She's really no trouble here. Hell, she don't eat that much—'cept *your* food, of course—and she's pretty good about calling us when she has to go potty. Oh, once in a while she forgets, but it ain't often." He took a long swallow from his cup, letting it slip away with a smack, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand, drawing across his mouth the blue potent cross that was tattooed at the base of his thumb. " 'Sides, this birthday party alone has made it worthwhile. In a retirement center, she would've missed all this . . . " And he made another movement of the head, this time to the commemorative gathering.

"Are you sure she *isn't* missing it?" asked MacCauley, aware more than ever that while others were immersed in small talk, old Mrs. Upsall sat immobile, with the same stony expression on her face.

"It's just the *emotion,* I tell you! Goodness, don't worry!" Mrs. Potts exclaimed, having re-entered from the kitchen just in time to catch MacCauley's question. "We've been talking to her for *weeks* about this party. Ninety is such an achievement!"

"It certainly is!" the nursemaid added, patting Mrs. Upsall's inert hand. "We've come a long way, haven't we, nanny?" Nanny didn't budge. The nursemaid sighed and took the smallest, most socially acceptable of sips of vodka from an orange-juice glass on

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the coffee table. She was the only one there drinking any kind of spirits, but it was a very discreet amount and in light of the occasion, no one questioned it. She wasn't a real nurse; in fact, knew almost nothing about geriatric care. But she had been a close friend of Beatrice Potts during the drinking years and was given the relatively cushy job of surveillant when Mrs. Upsall was brought westwards.

"Yeah, it's just the emotion," Potts said, echoing his wife's phrase to MacCauley. "We kept telling her last night while we was bathing her about the big celebration today. You know, we sorta *built it up* for her. "So I guess the emotion did kinda get the better of her."

Mrs. Mattesich set her cup down and turned around again. "I really think you're burdening yourselves unnecessarily," she said to manager Potts and his wife. "Retirement centers aren't what they used to be. They're *very* respectable." MacCauley and the Pottses all knew why the building owner was making such an issue of the retirement home. She was required by law to supply an apartment free of rent to the manager of her buildings. And avarice being the most cardinal of Mrs. Mattesich's sins, the idea that Potts and his wife lived in a two-bedroom apartment instead of a one-bedroom apartment rankled inside her. It was simply lost income.

"Respectable they might be . . . " answered manager Potts.

"Well, then . . . ?"

"Well, then, *what*?" he asked belligerently.

"Well, then, *why don't you put her away*?" Mrs. Mattesich said, her mouth pulling back into one long line, glad she'd made the statement, ninetieth birthday or no ninetieth birthday.

"Mrs. Upsall's stayin' as long as I want her to stay, dammit! And I don't wanna hear no more about it!" Potts crackled back, his short-fuse anger igniting the way it did during his chopper and leather jacket days. "Less you wanna get another manager," he added, his eyes narrowing meanly. Mrs. Potts stood squeezing her hands together, and a fluttery little laugh of nervousness escaped her. She was a woman who had been completely effaced by her own uncertainties, and when confronted with even the slightest problem was always at a loss as to what to do. On matters pertaining to the buildings she invariably had to call Potts even if the tenants called her first. She sensed the tension rising between her husband and Mrs. Mattesich, a tension which on other occasions had flared into

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open anger, and she didn't like it. She knew Potts was capable of almost anything if goaded, and certainly didn't want her mother's momentous celebration shattered.

"I don't want to get another manager," the building owner replied in a lighter tone, practically a laugh, and Mrs. Potts felt instantly relieved. "That isn't the question at all." And once more, the dough-faced woman turned away, leaving the issue suspended.

Then the incident was over. Potts took a swig of coffee and Mrs. Potts, smiling brightly, moved to the center of the room. "And now," she chirped, "it's time for the presents!"

There was a general commotion as the guests squirmed in anticipation; also because their plastic chairs were sticking. The moment everyone had been waiting for arrived. The guests faced the old lady as if they were about to witness a play unfold, but to the upturned, expectant faces Mrs. Upsall had nothing to perform. With a pat of her jewelled hand the nursemaid adjusted her wig, which, in its slide off one ear, had revealed a few dead strands of greenish-grey hair on the opposite side of her head. She leaned in to Mrs. Upsall and shouted, "The presents! It's time for the *presents*!", but old Mrs. Upsall remained as still as a Buddha. Then began the long ritual which everyone there except MacCauley and Mrs. Upsall seemed to enjoy. From both sides of the old lady, gentle hands tore at pastel birthday paper and ripped off ready-made bows. Amidst "oohs" and "aahs," each gift was exposed first to the crowd, then to the recipient. Since the woman still wasn't focussing on anything in particular, the articles had to be brought directly up to her face till they touched her nose.

"Isn't that nice, dear?" called the nursemaid into an insensate ear. "A tea filter! At least I *think* it's a tea filter! And what's *this*?" Mrs. Bryant-Armitage was unfolding an oversized bib that had just come out of its box. Without her glasses the nursemaid had to squint to read the colorful letters sewn onto the large square of cloth. "*I dribble when I nibble*," she read and shrieked with laughter. The motto was instantly repeated from one guest to another till a crescendo of guffaws and I-dribble-when-I-nibble's filled the room. The clamor was so loud that even Mrs. Upsall's catatonia seemed momentarily jarred. The old lady attempted to look around, but as her eyes absolutely would not focus, all she could do was direct her nodding approval to her audience, as though delighted that they were enjoying themselves so much. The nursemaid tied the bib

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securely around Mrs. Upsall's crane-like neck and chanted in an infantile voice, "Now we won't get the front of our dressie dirty, will we?"

More gifts followed. A boxed set of handkerchieves, a sachet of dried rose petals, and a box of candy—consisting of fondants, since Mrs. Upsall possessed none of her original teeth. There was also a remote control switch with push-button to change T.V. channels and a pair of high argyle socks to keep her matchstick legs warm at night. Everything was brought dangling in front of Mrs. Upsall's nose, but as no reaction was ever evinced from the frizzle-haired woman, Mrs. Potts had to announce over and over, "Mama's just so happy, she can't talk! It's the *emotion*!"

At last the painful pasquinade ended. A pile of ribbon, paper, and birthday cards covered Mrs. Upsall's lap like a bed of colorful autumn leaves. Then, with much pomp, Mrs. Potts brought in the birthday cake, a rose-colored affair of gargantuan proportions with veritable inches of white icing, the kind that disintegrates into powder once in your mouth. Sarni's Italian pastry shop had concocted the cake, which looked as if it were intended for some *Milanese* wedding, so elaborate were the motifs. There were cornucopias and vines with leaves and thick, scalloped seashells. The confectionery was the work of a true artisan, whose Old World talent was about as much appreciated by the present gathering as was the fanciful French name riveted to the facade of the building. Mrs. Potts set the masterwork on the coffee table in front of her mother and everyone immediately burst into a rousing, "Happy Birthday to youuuu . . . " The song ended and all waited for Mrs. Upsall to say something, but her wintry gaze and frozen smile did not alter. The cake, fortunately, had not been adorned with candles, for even in her best state the old woman would have been able to blow out only six or seven of them, and at present, certainly none. MacCauley leaned in to Mrs. Mattesich and whispered, "I don't think she knows what's going on!"

The building owner nodded in agreement, rose, and gave MacCauley a long, appreciative look. "Of course, she doesn't. The woman's plain gaga and ought to be put away." Then she took her cup and saucer and walked into the kitchen where she deposited them in the sink with a more-than-necessary clatter. Nearby, at a formica table, Potts gave her a blistering look and continued scooping out balls of ice cream and dropping them into cardboard plates. These were whisked off with great ceremony by two of the guests, as if they were carrying the platters of Louis XIV from the work-

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kitchens to the royal table. In the living room, Mrs. Potts added a generous slab of cake and a plastic spoon to each plate and passed it into whatever grasping hands appeared.

MacCauley sat directly opposite Mrs. Upsall and her praetorian friends. The nursemaid and Mrs. Bryant-Armitage were trying, not without difficulty, to feed the old lady, since by now it had become obvious to all that she could not do it alone. Mrs. Bryant-Armitage held the filled plate not far from Mrs. Upsall's chin, while the nursemaid formed small spoonfuls of cake and ice cream which she brought up to the aged lips. But as Mrs. Upsall continued to fixate far from what was directly in front of her, the nursemaid was obliged to jab the spoon into the old lady's mouth. The moment sweet flavors touched her tongue, Mrs. Upsall's sucking reflex took over and she apparently consumed most of what was fed her, though each time the spoon was withdrawn, dribbles of ice cream did, indeed, fall onto the bib. Again and again the nursemaid shoved the spoon into the intractable face.

MacCauley became increasingly restless. At the seventh jab he said loudly, "She doesn't know what she's eating! She doesn't even know what's going on!" This time there was no doubt that everyone present heard him. For all the world Mrs. Potts couldn't understand why her nice, young tenant had said such a thing, and her eyes welled with tears. Then Mrs. Bryant-Armitage noticed for the first time that the old lady's hearing aids dangled loosely by her neck and had been hidden by the frizzy ends of the long braids.

"She's not plugged in!" the woman announced triumphantly. "No wonder! She hasn't heard a *thing*, poor dear!"

"That explains it," Mrs. Potts said quickly. "We've all been so busy, we forgot to check them!" And she uttered a small, nervous laugh, mostly for her own assurance. The nursemaid duly attacked one side of Mrs. Upsall, Mrs. Bryant-Armitage the other. Both women began to insert the flesh-colored, conically shaped hearing devices into the old lady's ears. In a flash that lasted but a second, MacCauley saw an inch-long fingernail of Mrs. Bryant-Armitage's precede the hearing aid into the ear canal. The finger wielding the nail jabbed and jabbed, the way the spoon had jabbed the old lady's mouth. MacCauley winced. He had no time to cry out, however, for the gesture was both rapid and efficacious. In a second the two women terminated their work, the nursemaid adjusted the volume on the hearing aid, and Mrs. Potts began to sing, "Happy Birthday to youuuu . . . " for the second time. Everyone joined in, more animated than before, then waited again for a word

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or nod of acknowledgement from Mrs. Upsall. But she simply sat there. MacCauley noticed a tiny spot of bright red on the lobe of one of Mrs. Upsall's ears, the one that had been poked so viciously. The bright red spot was so like the color of Mrs. Bryant-Armitage's nail polish that his first thought was that perhaps the woman's nail had broken off and stayed there.

And then it happened. The spot became a rivulet and in an instant elongated down the woman's white neck and splashed onto the bib in two absolutely perfect drops of blood. They were soaked up immediately, just above the word *nibble*, turning into quarter-size stains as innocuous looking as strawberry ice cream. Mrs. Upsall's pupils blew up, startling her hazel-green irises and making them take cover behind the enlarging black holes. The old woman tottered forward from the waist and would certainly have hit her head on the coffee table had it not been for the remains of Sarni's cake and its protective layers of elaborate egg-white icing which cushioned the blow. Mrs. Potts screamed and ran for her ninety-year-old mother whose face, newly peroxided hair, and red satin bow were all buried in the birthday cake.

The third year resident doctor at the Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital explained that Mrs. Upsall had had a stroke. It had been coming on for twenty-four, possibly thirty-six hours, he said, and acute emotional stress had caused the actual syncope. Mrs. Potts felt sick at heart, the onus of guilt descending on her at once. Perhaps they'd been wrong to talk about the party so much in advance. Or even giving one. But, after all, ninety *is* such an accomplishment, isn't it? She stood with her forehead pleading, her eyes transfixed, her entire face turned up to the doctor as if to receive the sacrament.

"With a nonagenarian," the medical resident said, "You have to be very careful about building up too much anticipation."

"With a what . . . ?" demanded manager Potts, scowling.

The three of them stood on a ramp redolent of Pine Sol, just adjacent to the Emergency Room. Mrs. Upsall had been tubed, wired to an EKG machine, and punctured by several I.V.'s immediately on arrival. Her condition stabilized and she was wheeled off by an entourage of medical personnel to the Intensive Care Unit, where a neurologist was summoned. Though her pupils continued to remain black, bottomless abysses, and her complexion as pale and waxy as a church candle, her heartbeat, nevertheless, was regular.

"A nonagenarian," the doctor repeated. "Someone who's ninety."

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"Oh!" said Mrs. Potts, relieved that the word didn't connote some unspeakable medical anomaly. She wiped her damp palms against the sides of her dress and made a weak attempt at a laugh. "Oh, my! I've never heard that word before. Have you, Richard dear?"

Potts shook his head sullenly. Doctors were always doing that, he told himself. Talking down to you. Why couldn't they find a plain way to talk to plain people? Ninety's ninety and nothing else. Inside a grim, set mouth, Potts's teeth ground against each other, pulverizing the medical profession in particular and the learned in general.

Then the young doctor explained that Mrs. Upsall probably had a blood clot somewhere in the brain and that it was to be hoped that the clot would dissolve. Sometimes it did, leaving the patient with little aftereffect (he was careful not to say, "sequelae"). "Her ear canal has been lacerated severely," he intoned, "but that is only incidental. And coincidental, in that it occurred at the same time. The actual hemorrhage originated somewhere in the head."

"Is mama going to be . . . paralyzed?" asked Mrs. Potts.

The doctor studied the woman's anxious face a moment. Why did relatives always ask about paralysis, he wondered. Blindness, incontinence, atrophy of tissue and eventual necrosis were just as likely, but they were never asked about. "We don't know yet," he replied simply. "At her age you have to be prepared for anything. Including non-recovery."

There was nothing more the Pottses could do or think of asking. The resident promised that they would be telephoned if any change occurred, one way or the other, and the couple walked back through the Emergency Room. Outside it was night and Mrs. Potts couldn't help but make the analogy between the suddenness with which the day had disappeared and the precariousness of her mother's life. At the car, manager Potts thoughtfully opened the door for his wife, a gesture he was totally unfamiliar with and one he felt clumsy performing, but he wanted to manifest some sympathy to her and this seemed as good as anything. Distracted, Beatrice Potts never noticed the attention. Potts swore under his breath and got into the driver's seat. He reached for the plastic cup of coffee he'd set in the plastic coffee accessory tray over the axle bump a couple of hours before. The coffee was cold and pieces of broken-milk skim floated brackishly on the surface. He took a few sips anyway, then started up his tired Plymouth and headed back to *Beau Manoir*. The two Pottses remained silent all the way, thinking of the pastel paper and ribbons strewn on the floor, the

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cardboard plates with pieces of cake partly devoured, and, with great regret, the gallon container of perfectly good ice cream which by now would have melted into a glutinous glob on the kitchen table.

In the weeks that followed, the Pottses seemed relatively cheerful, and when the tenants enquired about Mrs. Upsall the answer was always the same. She was weak but progressing steadily, very steadily, and the managers were contemplating her return home. Only the immediate family was allowed to visit her, and this was certainly a relief to all at *Beau Manoir*, for no one wanted to make the trip to the hospital or see the stricken old woman in whatever state she was in. Colin MacCauley, of course, promised some homemade vegetable soup the day she returned, and on this gladsome news Mrs. Potts's eyes glistened. "Oh, that would do her wonders of good, Mr. MacCauley! We'll let you know as soon as mama's back!"

The return was made a month after the birthday party and was as inauspicious an occasion as the previous one had been heralded. In fact, no one actually *saw* Mrs. Upsall brought home—very late at night, in an ambulance that wended through the streets at cruising speed and sounded no siren. The nursemaid was on hand to help the attendants wheel the supine woman back into her room and prop her up against the plump pillows that stood in attendance. Then the Pottses and the nursemaid sat down at the formica kitchen table and celebrated quietly amongst themselves, the nursemaid with the vodka which never left her and the Pottses with cup after cup after cup of coffee. There were extensive dissertations on the efficacy of doctors, the mysteriousness of God, and the rampant venereal maladies in that part of the city. The dialogue was slightly chaotic, if not incoherent, and at two-thirty the nursemaid passed out on the sofa. The Pottses eventually went to bed after watching half of a soporific movie on Channel Five. All this, in any event, is what manager Potts reported to MacCauley the next day.

MacCauley prepared the promised soup immediately and with great care. In the early evening he took over a quart jar swimming with vegetables and potherbs and frosty with steam. He rang the doorbell of the Potts apartment. Inside, a soft three-note chime reverberated and a moment later the door was opened about six inches. The nursemaid, red-faced and puffy-eyed, stood scowling, bracing the door so that it would open no farther. "I brought this over for Mrs. Upsall," the young man said.

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The tuck between the nursemaid's eyes unpleated and she managed something of a smile. She slid the door open another couple of inches, still bracing it, and reached out. "Yes, I know, dear. We've been waiting for it." She took the jar in her arms.

Behind her, manager Potts appeared in a T-shirt, his naked arms embellished with blue tattoos of snakes, marijuana leaves, and the word VOTA, the name of his defunct infant sister. "Gee, thanks, MacCauley," he said. "She'll love it. She's been expectin' it all day."

Still the door remained opened at the minimal angle. "Can I see her?" MacCauley asked.

Now Mrs. Potts made an appearance, third in line, almost totally eclipsed behind her husband. "Oh, hello, Mr. MacCauley!" she exclaimed, standing on her toes. She, too, looked in need of sleep. "It's so sweet of you to make mama soup!"

"Can I see her for a moment?" MacCauley repeated. More than anything else he wanted to take a look at the old woman's eyes.

". . . See her?" queried Mrs. Potts, her voice fluttery and high. A nervous little laugh escaped her.

In a movement signifying authority and silence, the nursemaid raised a hand that sparkled of Woolworth rings and said, "I'm afraid not, dear. She's sleeping right now."

"Yes," muttered the obscured Mrs. Potts, "But we *do* thank you!"

"If you don't get out of the damn door," Potts complained contentiously to the nursemaid, "How'm I gonna close it?" The nursemaid stepped back into the Potts hallway with the coveted jar of soup and the door was slammed. MacCauley could have sworn he heard the dead bolt slide shut inside.

The following morning Beatrice Potts came to MacCauley's door at eight-thirty with the empty jar. She was wearing slacks and an orlon sweater that appeared to have been slept in, and violently bright fluff slippers that immediately took your eyes away from her face. It was a good thing, because at that hour she was without benefit of make-up, looked her full sixty-one years, and seemed totally eyebrowless. She thanked him for the soup which she said her mother had finished off for breakfast. Then, to MacCauley's astonishment, Mrs. Potts asked him if he would mind making a little *more* the next time. He stammered that there was still some of the same batch left and that he could bring it over that evening. A quart and a half. He didn't mention that he planned to have the remaining soup for his own next two meals. Mrs. Potts thanked

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him again and stepped in closely to present him with the empty jar. As she did, a faint whiff of breath freshener and booze, warm and sweet, invaded him.

"Mama just loved it, Mr. MacCauley! She had some for breakfast!"

"Yes, you said so."

"Oh, did I?" She looked utterly disoriented. Then she departed as precipitately as she had appeared, leaving the young man bewildered by the entire matter.

The same pattern was repeated over the next several weeks, and MacCauley began preparing two quarts of soup daily for Mrs. Potts. Sometimes he barely had enough left for a single meal for himself. In the evenings he would arrive with the freshly made soup at the Potts door, and in the mornings one of the Potts household would return the empty bottles with a report of how Mrs. Upsall had relished their contents. Whenever Mrs. Potts came over, MacCauley always detected the indelible mark of alcohol stamped on her breath. And never through all this did he catch the slightest glimpse of the old woman, who was forever asleep, medicated, or sitting in the bathtub.

The marginal resources of Colin MacCauley very soon began to dwindle. In preparing, every day, two quarts of fresh soup, often reinforced with meat, he had assumed a burden he was not accustomed to. There was no financial recompense from the Pottses and MacCauley was too embarrassed to speak to them of money. They had repeated to him so many times that the old woman would eat nothing else but his homemade soup that he felt entirely responsible for her well-being. He was perplexed at what had mushroomed into an insoluble problem and found himself sorely strapped to meet the upcoming month's rent.

He sat one night verifying the subtractions on his check stubs, hoping to discover some error that would put him in sudden possession of an extra ten or twenty dollars, when he heard a series of noises erupt. At first he thought someone in the building had turned up the television too loudly and that some tumultuous cop sequence was playing itself out on the screen. But then he heard a crash of kitchen pans and the raucous laughter of manager Potts, and knew that the commotion was coming from his apartment. MacCauley checked his watch. It was a little before midnight. The Pottses had always been model managers, not inclined to late hours or partying, and MacCauley was convinced the disturbance would die down. But in ten minutes it hadn't. The voices rose steadily,

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sometimes in hilarity, sometimes in anger, and then suddenly there was a wailing rendition of "Happy Birthday to youuuu . . .", followed by a small round of applause. The young man opened the door of his apartment and crept out into the corridor. The click of the lock and creak of the door prompted Mrs. Bryant-Armitage to do the same. The two of them occupied the downstairs front apartments, directly across from the Potts dwelling.

"What are they doing?" asked Mrs. Bryant-Armitage. Her robe was tied but she clutched the lapels together at the breast for extra protection. A faded cotton nightgown hung down to the floor.

"It sounds like they're celebrating," MacCauley replied.

"Celebrating what?"

Another round of the birthday song started up in the manager's apartment. This time someone was thumping on metal—a pan or pot—and drumming a beat in time to the ditty. The chant ended with an explosion of laughter. "What are we going to do?" asked Mrs. Bryant-Armitage, who had gone through more sets of managers than she cared to remember. "It's been going on for fifteen minutes now. They woke me up out of a sound sleep."

"Obviously we can't complain to the manager, if it's the manager who's making the noise," MacCauley said, feeling somewhat foolish with his answer.

"I'm calling the police," Mrs. Bryant-Armitage said and started for her door.

"No, don't do that." MacCauley hesitated a moment, as the woman stood waiting for him to come up with another solution. "I'll call the owner."

"Good. Then *she* can call the police if she wants to."

MacCauley went back to his apartment, his neighbor scuffing across the corridor after him. She stood in the threshold, not permitting herself to enter the young man's apartment. He sat down in a corner of the shoddy brocade sofa and picked up the booklet of phone numbers he kept on the end table. Mrs. Mattesich's number was quickly located. MacCauley dialed it, a little nervous about calling the building owner at that hour.

A click came through the phone. "Hello . . . ?"

"Hello, Mrs. Mattesich? This is Mr. MacCauley."

"Who?"

"Mr. MacCauley." The young man cleared his throat out of nervousness. "Over at *Beau Manoir.* Number Two."

"Oh, yes," said the voice, which he had expected to be disgruntled, but which wasn't.

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"I'm sorry to bother you, but there's a party or something going on over at the manager's apartment. They're making a lot of noise, I mean *really* a lot of noise. They woke up Mrs. Bryant-Armitage, and I guess some of the other tenants, too." The woman in the doorway nodded approval.

There was a pause on the other end of the line. MacCauley envisioned the dry, dough-faced woman sitting up in bed, a displeased American Gothic frown on her face. He wondered if there was a Mr. Mattesich. "At the *manager's* apartment, you say?" reiterated the voice.

"Yes," MacCauley cleared his throat again. "At the Pottses."

"I'll be right over," Mrs. Mattesich said, her voice sec, and there was an immediate click in the phone. MacCauley looked at Mrs. Bryant-Armitage, visibly satisfied, and remembered how she had torn at Mrs. Upsall's ear with her propellant nail. He slowly replaced the receiver, wondering if he had done the right thing.

Less than a quarter of an hour later Mrs. Mattesich pulled up in front of MacCauley's building, where the young man and Mrs. Bryant-Armitage were waiting. From the Potts kitchen emanated blazing fluorescent lights and a ruckus which had not abated since the phone call. The revelling was going at full speed, under its own steam, like a runaway vehicle which can only be stopped by collision. MacCauley had counted seven "Happy Birthday to Youuuu . . . " songs, all of them orchestrated by the incredible banging sounds. Several apartments in both Potts's building and MacCauley's now had their lights on, and across the street two dark figures huddled on a porch, probably discussing what to do. MacCauley and Mrs. Bryant-Armitage went down to the car to greet Mrs. Mattesich, whose dough face was livid. She had heard the disturbance the moment she had turned the corner, a block away. She marched directly up to the Potts door, MacCauley and Mrs. Bryant-Armitage behind her, and pushed the bell. The ballyhoo in the apartment was so great that neither those on the outside nor those on the inside could possibly hear the gentle lilt of the three-note chime. Mrs. Mattesich shook her head in disgust and removed a ring of keys bearing a tag that identified *Beau Manoir*. She located the right key and inserted it in the lock. The key turned but the door gave only a fraction of an inch before encountering resistance.

"They've bolted it," she said, and added contemptuously, "they would." She removed the key, jiggled through others, and selected one which she held straight up in the air like a mace of victory. Nothing short of acquiring another piece of property in the east end

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of Hollywood would deter her now. "The back door!" she announced. "And to my knowledge, there's no bolt there!" She stormed out the building, her two tenants at her heels, and crossed the lawn to the driveway separating the manager's unit from MacCauley's. The building owner bounded up the three paint-chipped steps that led to the Potts back entrance, and with an irate flick of key and wrist, threw open the kitchen door.

For a moment the pandemonium continued on its own momentum. Then, as the apparition of Mrs. Mattesich dominating the doorway came into manager Potts's field of vision, he ceased howling and banging. He was sitting on the floor, propped against the baseboard of the sink, wearing grease-stained khaki trousers that no one at *Beau Manoir* had ever seen before, a grimy T-shirt, and high black leather boots with spurs. On his head was a soiled leather cap with a visor. He had on a pair of the iridescent reflector glasses that were so popular in the Sixties with motorcyclists and dopers. Between his legs were the remains of what was once a six-quart aluminum pot. He had battered it relentlessly into an unrecognizable shape. In his hand was a large iron knife honer which had been used for the assault, and next to him was an open beer can. Mrs. Potts sat at the formica table in a grubby chenille bathrobe to which still clung the tabby hairs of a cat she had owned years before. In front of her was a glass of whisky. At the other end of the table, without her mahogany-colored wig and without her uniform, the nursemaid sprawled ungracefully on a chair, looking as if she might spill to the ground at any moment. She had already consumed most of the bottle of vodka before her. Both women were hooked onto their glasses with the steadfastness of a mountain climber hooked onto his piton: their lives depended on it. They were laughing and shouting at the same time, although it was impossible to tell what either one was saying. Finally Potts brought his fist and knife honer down in one final percussion on the aluminum mass in front of him and thundered, "*Cut it!*" Only then did the women cease yelling, dumbly following Potts's eye line over to the kitchen door.

Total silence ensued as the three inhabitants of the room stared at the three invaders, who were staring back at them. Neither group believed what it saw. Manager Potts slowly removed his reflector glasses, grimaced, and with an obscene tongue gave the implacable Mrs. Mattesich a long Bronx raspberry. He was completely drunk. Scattered everywhere were dozens of brown paper bags stuffed with trash and empty beer cans and empty bottles. Other beer cans,

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bent in half with hostility, had been tossed carelessly into a corner. The room smelled rancid and must have done so for days. One could sense the roaches sitting in their obscure niches preparing to take over as soon as the lights went out. Mrs. Mattesich, MacCauley and Mrs. Bryant-Armitage all entered the kitchen at once; they were the forces of order and had a holy mandate to possess the premises.

"What's going on here?" Mrs. Mattesich demanded. The two women squinted at her, trying to decipher the phrase. Potts made another vulgar sound with his mouth and reached for his beer. It was at that point that Colin MacCauley saw the two empty quart jars that he'd brought over full that morning sitting on the table. Three large soup plates with spoon handles sticking from them were piled sloppily next to the jars. In the sink other soup plates, rank and crusty with bits of hardened vegetable purée a week old, were stacked carelessly in zigzag fashion.

"Didn't you give Mrs. Upsall my soup?" the young man asked incredulously. No one answered. Then, in one of those one hundred and eighty degree about-faces that drunks so often and so unexpectedly engage in, Mrs. Potts's jubilance flipped to moroseness and she began to weep.

"Oh, dear," she sobbed, "Oh, dear, oh, dear . . . "

MacCauley understood then that the soups he had been preparing with such detail and concern and at such expense had been consumed by manager Potts, his wife, and the slovenly nursemaid. And what, then, had the fragile Mrs. Upsall survived on all these weeks? And what state was she in now? Angrily the young man left the kitchen and made his way through the living room, now in greater disorder and confusion than when he last saw it, the day of Mrs. Upsall's stroke. He crossed the front hall and entered the old lady's room. It was surprisingly neat, considering the bedlam elsewhere in the apartment. The covers of the bed had been drawn back, the pillows had been propped up, the television set had been angled toward the bed, and a bowl of plastic flowers and magazines had been placed on the night table. But there was no Mrs. Upsall. Everything in the room had been perfectly set, like museum pieces, waiting for the animation of a visitor. MacCauley's eye was drawn to the center of the bed, to the spot where the frail old lady habitually lay. Two canisters were posed there, beautifully decorated with minute, colorful flower patterns, like English sweet tins. In a home dulled by bad taste, the metal containers seemed to shine

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incandescently. Curious, MacCauley found himself drawn to them. He lifted one. It was remarkably light for its size. He pulled off the lid—a trifle too suddenly, for he jarred the cinerous contents, spilling smoky dust onto the bed.

Mrs. Mattesich had come up to the archway and stood watching. Next to her, swaying slightly, Beatrice Potts grabbed the door frame for support. "Oh, Mr. MacCauley," she said, attempting to keep her diction as genteel and unslurred as possible, "please be careful. You're upsetting mama." Then she stumbled past Mrs. Mattesich, advanced to the bed, and tried to scoop up the fallen ashes and replace them in the canister. Speechless, MacCauley could only stare at her.

With his leather boots from another era, manager Potts came stomping up to the bedroom. He was navigating better than his wife, and with each angry step he took, he seemed bent on crushing out authority. He halted and leaned against the doorway. "What is *that*?" asked Mrs. Mattesich imperatively, determined not to lose command. She pointed to the canister MacCauley held and the bits of dust Mrs. Potts was unsuccessfully trying to gather.

Manager Potts rubbed his red-rimmed eyes and sized up his opponent. She was the building owner and he was the manager. She *owned* things and he worked *for* them. He ground his teeth and set his mouth with the grave animosity of a gambler who has played his hand a hundred times and lost on each occasion. "That's Mrs. Upsall," he said, breathing beer onto the pasty face. "She . . . ." He paused, choosing his euphemisms. ". . . Left us . . . at the hospital. Two days after her stroke. Two days after her ninetieth birthday. We had her cremated . . . That had always been what she wanted . . . "

For a moment no one found anything to say. Mrs. Potts discovered she was too unsteady to bend over the bed without running the possibility of toppling into it. Like a supplicant before her priedieu, she fell to her knees beside her mother's bed, her lips moving distractedly in drunken incantation. From the kitchen came a Sanctus bell—the ring of vodka bottle against glass—and the gurgling sound of holy water being poured. Then Mrs. Mattesich turned to Potts and said very calmly, "Start moving tomorrow."

" . . . Moving?" he asked.

"Over to Number Twelve in the next building."

"That's a studio," mumbled Potts.

"That's right," continued Mrs. Mattesich. "Take down the sign

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there that says, 'Studio Available' and put one up over here that says, 'Two-Bedroom Available'. Whoever's interested, the rent is a hundred and eighty-five. And I want you to find a tenant *fast*. I've lost enough rent already."

Potts nodded numbly. He wished it were August and he had a motorcycle tankful of gas and all of Pacific Coast Highway stretching before him. But he'd sold the bike twelve years ago, bought a wedding ring, and made a down payment on a car. Maybe, he thought, that was where he'd made his mistake. "And I want this place aired out," Mrs. Mattesich ordered. "It smells like a brewery." Then she turned and left.

MacCauley heard the dead bolt slide open and Mrs. Mattesich walk out the front entrance of the apartment. Beatrice Potts hadn't registered any of the exchange between her husband and the building owner and was still concentrating very hard on amassing all the bits of ash, which had a terrible tendency to go airborne. Holding the canister carefully with both hands, MacCauley kneeled down next to the woman to help her in her task. He wondered how he was going to meet the month's rent, how he had managed to jeopardize his security—thrown it away, literally, for a mess of pottage—and if, under the circumstances, Mrs. Mattesich might possibly give him a few days' grace.

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DAVID IGNATOW

The Metamorphosis

Bumping against rock in the dark
he becomes the rock, stiffening in pain.
It fades and he becomes the lightness
and relief. He moves
and becomes the movement.
A rock is in his path once more,
he falls to his knees
in awe of his past self.

His knees make him a suppliant
of his changes. He seeks to know
and becomes a form of the curious.
He touches himself at all points
and becomes his hands.
They touch stone,
a change he remembers
and he becomes the remembrance
and moves nimbly in the dark
from rock to rock.

"In this dream"

In this dream I do not exist. This I know since it is my dream. How have I come to that conclusion when it is I who dream it? No one else thinks I do not exist but no one has inquired because no one knows I am dreaming. Therefore, since to myself I do not exist, it is true simply because I say so. This, then, is the problem: when I cease to dream will I exist or not exist?

I would like to become nothing for the pleasure of the great leap beyond being that becoming nothing only can achieve. I

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can become nothing because I am something and I am something because it can lead to nothing. Can I ask more of my life than that it bring me to its transcendence, that I should be in search of it, as the work of being itself?

My dream then, of not existing is my being telling me where I must go and what I must welcome as the rounding out of my completeness. I say this in the best of health and in expectation of a long life.

"There's the reality"

There's the reality; a truck passes by on the road outside my window. I have my knees crossed on the couch looking up at the trees and listening to the birds, as if I believed they had reality licked by being just birds utterly content with themselves. I could say the same for the truck but, as for myself—aware of the truck, the trees and myself—my mind is restless and seeking to replace the real with its own version, it's also to be reckoned with.

I agree, I want the truck to pass by my house, I want the birds to sing, I want the trees to rest upon themselves, I want my knees crossed upon the couch. I want to call all this the reality. And I must settle for a question.

The Life They Lead

I wonder whether two trees standing side by side really need each other. How then did they spring up so close together? Look how their branches touch and sway in each other's path. Notice how at the very top, though, they keep the space

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between them clear, which is to say that each still does its thinking but there is the sun that warms them together.

Do their roots entangle down there? Do they compete for nourishment in that fixed space they have to share between them, and if so, is it reflected in their stance towards one another, both standing straight and tall, touching only with their branches? Neither tree leans towards or away from the other. It could be a social device to keep decorum between them in public. Perhaps their culture requires it and perhaps also this touching of branches to further deceive their friends and associates as to the relationship between them—while what goes on beneath the surface is dreadful, indeed, roots gnarled and twisted or cut off from their source by the other and shrunken into lifelessness, with other roots flung out desperately in a direction from the entanglement, seeking their own private, independent sources. As they stand together, they present to the eye a picture of benign harmony, and that may be so, with both dedicated to the life they lead.

"I want to be buried"

I want to be buried
under the angel of a tree
among the cherubim of grass
and the lion of the wind softly
in my ear and the lamb of the rain.

I am gone.
Time has happened to me,
the minute hand on the face of the earth.
Earth is a happiness of its own
as running water
as flowing grass
as the flight of birds.

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"The seasons doubt themselves"

The seasons doubt themselves and give way
to one another. The day is doubtful of itself,
as is the night; they come, look around, slowly depart.
The sun will never be the same.
People give birth to people, flourish
and then die
and the sun is a flame of doubt
warming to our bodies.

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JEROME MAZZARO

Noon, Toronto

Buildings shimmer, and the shiny trim gives
back its glimmer to the green grass and leaves,
as noonday breaks on Bloor Street like a lure
toward which we move, slowed by a morning's care.

Drifting in and out from Queen's Park, music
accompanies the daily noonhour trek.
We dawdle at shop windows and the lights
and read of lay-offs and the record heat.

Our jeans are weighted by the noonday sun,
though contacts daily seem to be kept new
and afternoons turn out much like mornings—
customer inquiries and reordering.

But not like salmon on a final run!
We reenter these waters of our toil
knowing that, by nightfall, always things cool;
the air takes fire from our bodies' glow.

Jungle Gardens

The noise of shuttling diplomats grows faint
as sunlight softens in an oil of coats
and poised flamingos, lithe necks coiled upon
their backs or heads arched for a camera's lens,
turn emissaries of a noumenal.
I stuff a ticket stub into my jeans,
noting the pink, made richer by diets
of dog food, rice, and daily supplements.
Cave drawings mark the oldest renderings

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of these birds who flying yet form crosses.
Thought phoenixes by the early Christians,
they emblemized in Egypt the word red;
in Cornwall, bits of their dried skin were sold
as talismans; in Rome, their tongues were food.
Endangered since by landing strips and planes,
their breeding grounds are sanctified by law
and they, classed less wading bird than swimmer,
are relative to both the duck and goose.
Veering to glimpse nature's rarer marvels,
people attempt live Biblical Gardens
where each plant's marked with a verse citation,
leaving summation to Apicius' heirs.
I lag behind, hoping to hear the honk,
thinking a while of Degas' primping dancers
about to show a world their gracefulness,
caught briefly in the lull before pure art
where strength is gathered for an inner push.
Light tests the speckled shade they cling hard to.

Driving South

Leaving Windsor, we had light snow flurries,
but by Toledo, we could hardly see.
By Findlay, the snow had stopped completely,
and after, the road ahead of us was clear.

Stuckey signs increased and then gave way to
Kentucky Fried Chicken and Magnolia
Plantations as our drive neared Atlanta
and stray beams of our headlights struck red clay.

Like beacons, inn and Exxon signs floated,
guiding us in. Next morning, leaving, too,

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they glowed, dimming as the sky paled to blue
and a landscape greened as we drew farther South.

"Malabar!" a voice inside kept saying
as if by driving we had conquered time.
Streamers of spanish moss caught every limb.
Gulf shrimp and catfish towered atop our plates.

Buffalo/Stasis

Another heavy snowstorm. The air
crackles with sounds of closings—
city offices, banks, schools.
Red Jacket's monument in the
cemetery disappears in
blowing snow and sculpted drifts.

Bidding the day to stop is like
King Canute commanding waves.
Snowplows become futile acts
of will as much as poets' naive
promises of timelessness:
Children keep being born; stomachs
ache for food; and thoughts go
racing to tomorrow.

A Paris velodrome gets my own thought,
the cyclists spinning breezes with
their wheels in the patterned commotion
of an event marred only by accidents.
You look up from your growing afgan
and ask if I would like some tea.

Outside are hearty welcomes, handshakes,
bought drinks and, soon to be seen,
green grass blades eating at the snow.

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MARILYN WANIEK

I Imagine Driving Across Country

I imagine driving across country
with my sister and brother.
In California we buy caps,
the kind truck drivers wear,
bright colors that keep the sun away.
We take turns at the wheel
and sing all the songs we know.
My sister's voice is like mine
and I stop singing to listen.
All night we drive through the mountains.

My brother pulls the car over
at noon in the desert
and we get out to stretch our legs.
A strange man takes our picture
standing beside the car
in our decorative skins.

In the car again
we make the other trips,
through Kansas and Oklahoma
in the pink Lincoln and the Kaiser.
We count Uncle Sam mailboxes
and white horses,
we sleep at dusk-to-dawn drive-ins.

I catch the beautiful slow smile
of our dead brother
in the rear-view mirror,
and our father in his uniform
drives 80 and when the cop stops us
—What do you think you're flying, boy?—
he answers: B-52's.

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Now we are telling jokes in the farmland,
playing the dozens, getting down.
In Maine we get out to see the ocean.
We have come home again,
our old house there on the hill.

That night none of us can sleep.
In our separate rooms we lie awake
in the shared darkness
and imagine ourselves
still driving across country,
still falling home down the highway.

My Grandfather Walks in the Woods

Somewhere
in the light above the womb,
black trees
and white trees
populate a world.

It is a March landscape,
the only birds around are small
and black.
What do they eat,
sitting in the birches
like warnings?

The branches of the trees
are black and white.
Their race is winter.
They thrive in cold.

There is my grandfather

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walking among the trees.
He does not notice
his fingers are cold.
His black felt hat
covers his eyes.

He is knocking on each tree,
listening to their voices
as they answer slowly
deep, deep from their roots.
I am John, he says,
are you my father?

They answer
with voices like wind
blowing away from him.

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JEANNE FOSTER HILL

The Bones that Shape the Emptiness

I hold a face in my hands,
for a few hours,
for a few years.
I feel the hollows below the skin—the eye holes,
the teeth moving into the jaw bone.
It is my own.
For one infinite moment I hold
my skull in my palms. My crossed bones,
the wings of my death angel, fly onto a slate worn thin
in a tilting graveyard on a hill
where I leaned back once gazing out
to the meeting point of ocean and blazing autumn sky,
and felt the chill slide into my bones.

Across from me, the window holes of a house
looked back.
I wondered who walked alone down that hall,
who descended the darkened stairs,
who passed through the door.

Feeling again the skin—yes, it is my face
I take from my hands,
gasping-in air. I live again
six years and six hundred miles
from that shore. I go down the stairs
in the company of my coffee mug and a saucer and a fork.
I lay my ear against the warm body of the cat and hear
his wisdom: snow purrs; snow's body is cold.

Take what is here to take—the oak woodwork
a tree had to offer. The fern
that gives up its breath to the room. The dishes
that grow on our tables. The refrigerator that opens

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its body for food. Take what is here
to take.

As long as we are alive,
the skeleton within us is imaginary.
Nothing is more true of life
than death. In some graveyard somewhere
they make preparations. It is best to die in the fall
before winter comes up the back stairs.

If I were to travel again to that graveyard,
an old woman would be at the window,
rocking back and forth in her chair
by spears of aspidistra, nodding her head—yes.
Her face would carry the suggestion of a smile
as she picked her way upward among the tufts of grass.
She has much affection for the slate she bends to stroke
gently with her fingers. She gives
the oil of her hands; she takes the powder
of its years. The old woman has made the trip
many times down the hall,
descending the stairs, and through the door
to climb the hill outside
again up to her window. It was here she first leaned back
and felt the chill. She puts her fingers, powdery from slate,
to her face—yes, there is more flesh now, than then; the bones
more padded from her touch, though the skin is old.

She looks out to the meeting point of ocean and autumn sky
and sees the rainbow she colored as a child arc across the last
page
of a love book she made in the fourth grade
for a boy—she can't remember his name. *I love you.*
Do you love me? she wrote. And made a separate page
for *Answers.* The grey-haired teacher with the smiling face
saw her pass the book in class and interrupted
its course. Later she returned it, saying,
It is beautifully made.

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It is the teacher
who bends to trace the wings of death
on the slate, the crossed bones, the outline of the skull,
the eye holes, the toothless jaw. It is her face
at the window. I trace
the lines that cross the skin
and give the oil of my hands
for the powder of her
years. I feel
below the face
the bones that shape the emptiness.

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PHILIP DACEY

He Goes to a Costume Party Dressed as Gerard Manley Hopkins

The cassock doesn't quite fit, it's too loose
In the shoulders, and the white collar's more
Like a slipped halo, but that's all right, it
Makes me look thinner, and Hopkins, who ate
His meat smothered by a sauce of shadows,
Grew so thin over the years everyone since
Has been able to see clear through him to
Heaven.
For a long time now I've been at work—
A friend jokes I must be at prayer—on a book
Of poems about Hopkins, many of which
He speaks or speaks in, along with Bridges,
Felix Randal, even Walt Whitman. So when
The invitation came, I didn't have
To think at all. I'd be Hopkins. And am
Now, an unlikely drink in one hand, the other
Deep in the potato chips. A sign on my back
Advertises confessions, twenty-five cents.
I've had one taker so far, a lissome blonde
Who confessed she'd never made it
With a priest, especially a dead Jesuit,
And wondered if perhaps we couldn't offer
Ourselves up on that soft altar in the guestroom.
I tried to explain about virginity, his
Not mine, and propriety, a certain gesture
I owed his memory, or spirit even. But she
Was having none of it, was, after all, Dietrich
In *The Blue Angel*, from top hat to high-heeled shoes,
And I had once learned her famous torch song
By heart because I loved Lola-Lola's
Legs in black silk tights, and out of them.
So
In we went, shutting the door as a mummy
Smoking a cigarette and Dorothy Lamour in
Road to Rio passed by, and tripped the lock.

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Glory be to God for dappled things, like hips
The white grip of elastic still marks, a mons
Fur rides electrically, and, look, see, there, ah,
The achieve of, the mastery of, a mouth. What would
Dear, hidden Hopkins say about this spread
Of Nature, fold, fallow, and plough, the wholly
Holy holely beautiful, hard prod of breasts?
Once said, "I think there is no one can admire
Beauty of the body more than I do."
So say it outloud. "A talker, are you?"
"That was Hopkins. Only he saw more men's
Bodies than women's. Lots. Was eloquent on brawn
And thew." Her thigh muscle ripples. "Not, I'll not
Untwist, slack they may be, these legs, love-legs,
Knot of them, inscape of outriding
Joy." "More Hopkins?" Her belly shines
Like shook foil. "Sort of." I touch the fine
Brown spot on her shoulder her birth gave her.
"Thisness," I say. "Huh?" "It's his word. It means
The sign that means you are, and are no other."
She licks my neck, singly, in answer. Soon it's time
For the rolling level underneath us steady air
And we swing off on a bow-bend, pride, plume, and act here
Buckle! And the fire that breaks from us then, a billion
Times told lovelier, O my Chevalass, as we fall
Gall ourselves, and kiss, in carnal heaven,
Two worlds, like no and yes, impossibly allied.

That was then. Now she's leggily atop
The piano, one knee cupped in her hands,
The classic's classic shot, surrounded by
Berliners, and I think she's singing to me,
Dacey playing Hopkins playing Emil Jannings
Playing Professor Immanuel Rath playing
The fool. *Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss.* What I
Want to know is, Who's playing Dacey, and Why?
I'll go home tonight and strip down as far
As I can, and maybe meet my part's actor
In the dark, but for now, let me be Gerard,
And him in love, and us holding up the bar.

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PATRICIA SHEPPARD

Advertisement

If you would love me,
you must love abandon,
putting aside everything
the self has arranged around itself.

A snake, beginning its moult,
not knowing why it should leave its skin
to go, as if for the first time
into the world, goes.

The soul can run free then,
while the body is reforming.
How happy the soul is.
I can promise you that much.

The Whistling Swans

I have never heard a sound like that before,
the sound the air makes when it speaks,
as hollow as the bones of a bird,
as precisely fierce as the beak.
The feathers that lift the swans overhead
guide arrows to their destination,
thus, these sounds pierce the heart purely.

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LINDA PASTAN

Waiting for My Life

I waited for my life to start
for years, standing at bus stops
looking into the curved distance
thinking each bus was the wrong bus;
or lost in books where I would travel
without luggage from one page
to another; where the only breeze
was the rustle of pages turning,
and lives rose and set
in the violent colors of suns.

Sometimes my life coughed and coughed:
a stalled car about to catch,
and I would hold someone in my arms,
though it was always someone else I wanted.
Or I would board any bus, jostled
by thighs and elbows that knew
where they were going; collecting scraps
of talk, setting them down like bird song
in my notebook, where someday I would go
prospecting for my life.

Elegy

Somewhere a poem
is waiting for me
to write it: in the jewelry box,
coiled into an old ring
or stopping the hands
of a watch;
in the vanishing barn, risen

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to the top of the pail
to be skimmed off;
or in the tree outside
engraved in green ink
on the underside of a leaf.

In my old room
the white curtains blow
like ghosts of themselves
over the sill;
under the bed misplaced words gather
to grab my helpless ankle.
It is a poem
the child I was hides
in the ear of the woman
I have become: a poem
whose lines were the lines
of my father's face.

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JAMES REISS

Anna's Song

By now the Master was deaf and went on working
when I called him to dinner
He would sit at the piano
and time a sonata
to a game of hide-and-seek
he played with his shadow cast
in candlelight on the carpet

I would be sweeping or cleaning the keys
in ascending stepladders of sound
when he would crash in scattering
bits of music paper like confetti scribbling
me lovenotes deathnotes notes
about how the music of Handel made him think of linden

rows outside a noisy beerhall
until I swear I could taste beer in those trees
could smell the foam of ale in glasses
raised to the whitewooded branches
Then he would play something and make me sit
on his tattered sparrow of a couch and call me queen
of the Rhine ignoring my steelgray hair

my face an apron of wrinkles
and I would listen and it would be the coronation
waltz of the pinetree princess in the mill town
where I was a girl and braided my hair
Piggytails my lover called me long ago pulling
me down onto the pineneedles

I remember peeking out from under the boughs
later trying to look hard
pretending I knew how to smoke

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as the sun came up over the waxworks glazing
the chimney pots
even then wanting to cry hosanna
to the pigeons and sing immortal songs

Even then I knew the sound of legs rubbing
is a miracle of wild hush
It is the crickets' lullaby to the moonless
shore of a pinetree island
where my lover comes to me
with pipe and timbrel

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ROBERT PINSKY

Dreaming of Deafness

1

Wind and the wet woods muffle
The road's noises to a thin surf;
There, trucks—like horses
Pounding across a hard clayflat—
Blunder through the rain.

Last night in the dream
When with lethal rhythms
Horses tore soundlessly
Through the gray drizzle, I
Could not stop or escape them.

And by morning, this level quiet:
A brief cotillion of wings
Under the window; then, a catbird
Questioning the weather with two
Notes; the road's untiring water.

2

Remote, violent noises recall
The immediate, violent
Silence of the dream,

A silence so absolute
That it might be
The mind's own fear of all

That it knows hears
Is or evades (what
Have you not thought?)—or,

The mere mortal fear to know

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Hear and become
Nothing at all.

And the bird moderately
Breathing in, in its own good
Time, shaped for an end,

Calls twice: degree, partialness,
A change where the fear of nothing
And the fear of all possibility

Both derive possible,
Sweet, hesitant breath—
All but irrelevant.

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WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN

Schoenberg, Rosen, and the Common Listener

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO I was trying hard to like Schoenberg's music. Seemingly authoritative writers like René Leibowitz (*Schoenberg and His School*) and Dika Newlin (*Bruckner, Mahler, Schoenberg*) had told me not only that the music of Schoenberg, together with that of his disciples Berg and Webern, was the only true music of our time but also that it followed inevitably from the breakdown of tonality progressively evidenced in the music of Wagner, Debussy, and Mahler (which I loved) and also in that of Bruckner (which I did not and do not love). It all seemed so logical and unanswerable—and in precisely the way that most appeals to an adolescent mind. For reasons very similar to those for which some of my classmates were becoming Marxists, I was trying to become a true-blue Schoenbergian.

In the summer of 1951, while in Vienna, I bought a score of *Pelleas und Melisande* and, being unable to find scores, bought parts for the Second and Third String Quartets. (My fantasy was that I would copy out my own scores from the parts—which I may actually have started to do.) The following summer, once more in Vienna, my increasing desire not to be left behind by the sweep of history even led me, very foolishly, to venture past Russian guards into the Russian sector of the city, to secure from the offices of Universal Edition an orchestral score of *Gurre-Lieder*. These scores were then totally unavailable in this country, but a few others were and, once back home, I bought some, along with the few available records, and set to work. I laboriously analyzed the first ten pages or so of the Fourth Quartet in terms of the various melodic and harmonic uses made of the tone-row and its transformations, just as Leibowitz's book had taught me to do. I even tried a bit of twelve-tone composition and struck up a correspondence with the pianist Lennie Tristano, the most "advanced" jazz musician of that time, in which I helpfully pointed out that the twelve-tone method obviously also held the key to the future of jazz. (Tristano gently replied that I seemed not to have much acquaintance with jazz improvisation, and was kind enough to invite me to come and talk with him. We shared a turkey sandwich one Thanksgiving evening.)

Soon after that my patience ran out. There was at that time a well-known music critic who was full of talk about "twelve-tone consciousness," a state of mind (or ear) in which, evidently, one could hear the uses being made of the row and its variants in a twelve-tone piece as naturally and easily as one learns to hear the uses made of the key in which a tonal piece is written. I wrote this man a long and tediously earnest letter, inquiring how one attained to this elevated state of spirit, but received no reply. At that point insulted nature vindicated her rights

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(as Gibbon once remarked of a rather different circumstance), and I returned to the music I naturally enjoyed.

There I have remained ever since. In the meantime, however, that body of music has come to include a good deal of Berg, Webern, Bartok, and Elliott Carter. But Schoenberg has remained a sticking-point. Except for the later, more fantastic sections of *Gurre-Lieder*, the Second Quartet, and *Pierrot Lunaire*, I have derived no pleasure from his music on the chance occasions when it has come my way and I have not gone out of my way to hear it. (The frequently heard *Verklärte Nacht* and the early, Wagnerian sections of *Gurre-Lieder* are of course, as eager commentators never tire of pointing out, "easy" and "accessible": but they have always seemed to me boring and stolid as well.)

My puzzlement at my failure, after all this time, even to begin to make sense of the main body of Schoenberg's music has been aggravated by the fact that although I am visually insensitive and have very little knowledge of the visual arts, I find much of the work of Picasso, Matisse, Pollock, Hofmann, and Rothko not merely accessible but as exciting as any painting I know. Why should someone who knows a great deal more about music than he does about painting be directly and powerfully affected by the Rothko Chapel in Houston and yet unable to make sense of the music Schoenberg was writing almost half a century earlier?

Conversely, why should so many people who perhaps know less about music than I do go about behaving as though middle and late Schoenberg were not only easily accessible but positively enjoyable? I remember smoldering inwardly at a concert in Boston a few years ago at which Lorin Maazel beat time for the New Philharmonia Orchestra, which throughout the evening produced its usual gorgeous sounds but played with the lifeless inflection Maazel habitually elicits from the great ensembles he is privileged to conduct. In addition to works by Brahms and Mahler, the program included Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra*, Opus 31, of 1927–28. I had never heard the work before, and it made no sense to me; but I could and did recognize in its performance the same lifeless playing that characterized the entire evening. Yet the Symphony Hall audience went wild after the Schoenberg—even though the quality of performance alone should have dictated a far less enthusiastic response. I felt, perhaps arrogantly, that those people could not all be hearing something I was missing, that they were unconsciously letting themselves be made part of a happening, the victims of a high-toned media hype.

I have been driven to have another shy at Schoenberg by the appearance of Charles Rosen's little book on him in the Viking Modern Masters series.[1] As I remarked several years ago in these pages, what so impressed me about Rosen's *The Classical Style* was his recognition—and his ability to put into analytical practice the recognition—that what counts in music is what is experienced by the ear, that (as Rosen memorably put it) "the priorities of hearing must be respected." In one especially interesting chapter he objected to the work of theorists like Schenker and Réti, who had, he claimed, slighted the priorities of hearing in favor of schemas

[1] ARNOLD SCHOENBERG, by *Charles Rosen*. Viking. $2.50.

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derived from what their eyes had seen on the composer's page. (I should immediately add, however, that while I found Rosen's demonstrations convincing, professional musicians who know the work of Schenker and Réti at first hand, as I do not, have told me that Rosen was not entirely fair to them.) Rosen's own analyses of the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven seemed, on the other hand, almost always to respect the priorities of hearing while at the same time shedding new light on the complex process by which the classical style evolved; hence I found him the model of the music critic operating as historian—with neither function getting in the way of the other.

Often in his analyses Rosen extracted from the rich overall texture of the music what he (somewhat unfortunately, I think) called a "skeleton": some sequences of descending thirds in the development of the first movement of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, for example, and, in the beautiful solo piano melody that opens the second movement of Mozart's Concerto K. 488, "a simple descending scale, accompanied by a parallel longer movement above it." Whereas the analysts Rosen had earlier criticized had (at least some of the time) intended to suggest that the schemas they extracted from the works of the classical masters were more or less consciously primary in the act of composition, and should therefore be primary in the listener's experience of the music, Rosen made it very clear that he had no such intention. "This notion," he wrote, "advanced by Schenker and lesser critics like Réti, of an exterior and basically trivial form imposed for the sake of clarity upon a more fundamental process, will not bear even passing scrutiny: it does not correspond to the psychology of any composer . . . ; nor, above all, does it bear any relation to even the most perceptive musician's experience of listening to music." And Rosen eloquently and painstakingly explained his analysis of the Mozart melody:

> The structure of the melody may be two regular parallels, but its beauty and its passionate melancholy lie in the irregularity of rhythm and variety of phrasing which reveal every possible expressive facet of the two simple descending lines. . . .
>
> Before there is a misunderstanding, I hasten to add that I do not suppose that Mozart started with any such skeleton as I have given, and then embellished it. Reading a composer's mind, retracing the steps by which he worked, is not a viable critical method even when the composer is alive and one can ask him how he did it—he generally does not know. . . .
>
> The skeleton of the melody I have indicated is then, emphatically, not the "musical idea." Nor is it (although it is not irrelevant) what makes this theme so beautiful: when we admire the bone structure of a beautiful face, we are not really interested in osteology.

What Rosen was doing, then, in extracting his "skeletons" was analogous to what a Shakespeare critic, say, does when he calls our attention to

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animal imagery in *King Lear* or cooking imagery in *Troilus and Cressida*: the point is not that we are to ignore such "exterior and basically trivial" features of the plays as plot and characterization, to forget about the evolving story of an old king or a pair of ill-fated lovers and to direct our attention to the recurring patterns of images (ah—there's another one!); rather, having noticed something we might otherwise have missed which, however, contributes (or ought to contribute) to our total response to the play, we are then invited to fit our newly acquired knowledge back into that response with enriching effect. Similarly, Rosen did not intend us to hear patterns of descending thirds or a pair of descending scales in place of the music Beethoven and Mozart actually wrote: he was merely trying to call our attention to an important part of our experience that we might not have been aware of but that would enrich our hearing of the music once we were made aware of it.

The Classical Style was almost universally, and quite rightly, hailed as a very important book when it appeared. But one of Rosen's more obtuse critics, objecting to his treatment of the Mozart melody, stubbornly insisted that the melody "is, and implies nothing but, the series of notes Mozart actually wrote." Which is about as sensible as saying that a sentence or proposition implies nothing but the words it is composed of. As Rosen observes in his Schoenberg book: "The notes of a melody can be dissonant or consonant to each other. It is by this means that a melody can imply its own harmony, as most tunes in fact do." And larger musical structures than a melody—a movement or even a whole work—can have similar implications. Just as a philosopher can often help us to see the other propositions entailed or assumed by a given proposition, so a music critic, like a literary critic (or for that matter an art critic), can help us to become aware of such implications by calling our attention to certain non-obvious and yet relevant, even important, features of a work. Moreover, if he has the tact and sensitivity of a Rosen he can do so without thereby claiming (as Rosen said Schenker and Réti and others had done) that such features are in any way primary, that they constitute the "real" work, the "essence" of what the composer or writer or painter was driving at.

But what happens if the music one is dealing with was actually composed according to a conscious scheme calculated to produce just the sort of schema that Schenker and other analysts extracted from the works of the classical masters? In his essays, now collected in a new and enlarged edition of *Style and Idea* (St. Martins, 1975), Schoenberg is full of protestations about the vital role played by the emotions and the unconscious in the process of composition—he even demonstrates how certain themes and thematic relations seem to have descended directly to him from The Supreme Commander (his charming Austrian way of referring to God). But I have always felt that on this matter, as on some others, Schoenberg was protesting too much, and that Leibowitz, for all his shortcomings, was closer to the mark in stressing the extreme deliberateness and self-consciousness with which Schoenberg shaped his career: "With the creation of the twelve-tone technique," wrote Leibowitz, "the art of music enters a

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new phase . . . because this discovery itself marks the precise moment when . . . the intuitive acquisitions of a particular polyphonic period are organized, by a consciousness which comprehends them clearly, into a complete synthesis of the premises which made them possible, and become the basis for future acquisitions."

The problem is not just that Schoenberg's scheme was a perfectly conscious one (I gather that Schenker and the other analysts criticized by Rosen have differed among themselves, and from composer to composer, as to how consciously the schemas they discovered in classical works were employed by their composers): the problem is also the nature of the scheme itself. The twelve-tone method (or, as Schoenberg preferred to call it, the "method of composing with twelve tones") is by now familiar enough to need only a hasty description. The entire musical work is to be generated out of a chosen sequence (or "row" or "series") of the twelve tones of the chromatic scale. The row may be stated melodically in its basic form, in inverted form (i.e., with each ascending interval changed to an equal descending one, and vice versa), backwards ("retrograde"), or in retrograde inversion, thus combining the other two altered forms. But (at least in the early twelve-tone works) there was a stern rule against "redundancy": no tone of the basic row or of any of its three altered forms could be returned to until all twelve tones had been sounded. Since the basic row and each of its three altered forms can each be transposed to each of the eleven other tones of the chromatic scale, there are thus forty-eight possible forms of a row (counting its basic form). Groups of three or more notes from any of these forms may also be employed harmonically. The goal of such a method of musical composition is of course perfect, total unity and integrity. That this goal was shared by many of the artists and thinkers of Schoenberg's intellectual world—the world of Karl Kraus (to whom Schoenberg dedicated his *Harmonielehre*), of the architect Adolf Loos, of the novelist Robert Musil, of Kokoschka and Wittgenstein—is amply demonstrated by Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin in their splendid book *Wittgenstein's Vienna* (Simon and Schuster, 1973), the first four chapters of which should be required reading for anyone with a serious interest in Schoenberg. (This intellectual world, incidentally, was also that of Schenker, who had a famous dispute with Schoenberg over whether a certain Brahms piano piece was atonal or in A minor.)

But the unity attained through the twelve-tone method (or whatever one decides to call it) simply cannot be heard by the listener I have chosen, echoing of course Dr. Johnson's phrase "the common reader," to call the common listener: the listener for whom Tovey wrote his essays and for whom Rosen wrote *The Classical Style*, the trained and experienced listener who can follow closely the evolving expressive content of a piece of music, who can recognize themes when they reappear and who has some idea of how tonal resources are being exploited, but who does not have perfect pitch, "twelve-tone consciousness," a complete analytical knowledge of the score in question, or any other such arcane acquisition. As a critic of Schoenberg, and especially of the twelve-tone (or "serial") works, Rosen thus faced an entirely different problem from that which he faced in his

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earlier book: in *The Classical Style* he could extract his skeletons from a Mozart Concerto or a Beethoven Sonata and then move on to describe the total expressive effect of the work, and the relation of skeleton to expressive effect, as he repeatedly did with eloquence and insight. But once you have described the skeleton of a twelve-tone piece by analyzing how the forty-eight possible forms of the row are variously deployed on the page, what is there left to describe that the common listener can actually hear?

Even if you accept the familiar argument that Western Music, in order to advance, "had to" abandon tonality—and deterministic arguments are notoriously dangerous where the arts are concerned—still, as the works of Stravinsky and Bartok and countless lesser composers demonstrate, there were a thousand ways of abandoning (or at least severely weakening) tonality: Schoenberg's twelve-tone method, like Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, has something madly absolutist, fanatical, and ascetic about it. If the common listener's ear is consistently deprived even of such temporary resting-places and points of reference as were provided by the non-tonal or quasi-tonal works of Stravinsky and Bartok and others, and also by the atonal works written by Schoenberg before he embarked on the ten-year silence (1913–23) during which he evolved the twelve-tone method (or borrowed it from the obscure Josef Hauer), the expressive range of the music is radically limited and an enormous amount is thereby lost. To be expressive in a complex and varied manner, music must be continuously followable by the educated ear of the common listener. As Schoenberg himself once wrote: "*Form in Music* serves to bring about comprehensibility through memorablity." But if the ear has as little to catch hold of (and remember) as it does in twelve-tone music, what is usually communicated is a rough general mood rather than a particular, sharply articulated expressive form. Or perhaps a succession or alternation of such moods: the favorites in twelve-tone music are exacerbated nightmare and distorted lyricism. But a succession of such general moods is quite different from (and much cruder than) the continuously evolving expression we ordinarily demand from the music we value most highly.

It would seem that in order to be continuously followable, works in which the common listener is not given temporary resting-places or points of reference must either be very short, or they must be loaded with sensational "effects," or they must be dependent upon a vocal text. Webern chose the first of these three solutions; in his two operas and *Der Wein* (though *Wozzeck* is not actually a twelve-tone work) Berg chose the third, while in works like the *Lyric Suite* and the Violin Concerto he employed the method rather loosely; Schoenberg chose all three solutions at different times, rather inclining towards the second. (It is amusing and ironic that the dire, unsmiling figure who always glares out at us from the photographs, the self-proclaimed Composer of Destiny who once said he felt as though he had "fallen into an ocean of boiling waters," was addicted to the cheapest and flashiest orchestral effects, and was often at his best, as in *Pierrot Lunaire*, when he turned loose his grotesque sense of humor and fantasy.)

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The difficulties of finding something else to talk about in twelve-tone music besides the ways in which a piece has been organized around and through the tone-row show up very clearly in Rosen's chapter on Schoenberg's twelve-tone works, the weakest chapter in the book. It is entitled "Serialism and Neoclassicism," and when Rosen is not simply doing the usual sort of twelve-tone analysis, he is laboring to prove, as of course Leibowitz and others before him have done, that this music really *does* belong to "the tradition." Virtually every page of *The Classical Style* offered illuminating evocative description of the music at hand (and, in the process, clearly demonstrated Rosen's love for it), but in this chapter of the Schoenberg book there is almost no such description (and consequently no evidence of love, or even much of liking, for the music). Instead we get the fancy playing with words and ideas that was only very occasionally present in *The Classical Style*. The supposed "rivalry" between the schools of Schoenberg and Stravinsky was only illusory, not real, it turns out: "The similarities between Stravinsky's *Jeu de Cartes* and Schoenberg's [Third] Quartet, Opus 30, with their imitations of early-nineteenth-century form and phrasing, between large religious works such as *Die Jakobsleiter* (or parts of *Moses und Aron*) and the *Symphony of Psalms*, have become more apparent." More apparent to whom? Just try listening to the works in question and see if you can hear the significant similarities implied by Rosen.

In order to demonstrate the historical inevitability of Schoenberg's career, Rosen writes: "Serial technique was invented to sustain this expressivity [which Schoenberg had always felt to be essential to his work] when tonality had grown so weak and so diffuse that it could produce only melodic lines as flaccid and as accommodating as those of Rachmaninov, Pfitzner, and Fauré." This seems to me just plain cheating. What about the melodies of the tonal works Stravinsky was to write in the 30's and 40's? Or, for that matter, what about the melodies that might have been written by Mahler, who died young and might well have lived until 1940 without ceasing to be a tonal composer?

Finally, Rosen concludes that whereas in the earlier atonal works Schoenberg had underplayed the element of pitch, in his twelve-tone works he sought to reestablish its importance:

> Serialism appeared to realize an old dream of classical musical aesthetics: the reconciliation of unity and diversity. The unity is guaranteed by the series, which retains an essential invariance through all its forty-eight incarnations. Out of the series, an extraordinary variety of melodic and rhythmic shapes could be drawn. . . .
>
> Schoenberg's twelve-tone system once again exalted pitch as the essential vehicle of invariance, as the fundamental element of unity. It did so, however, at one remove—and that is its grandeur. . . .
>
> In serialism as Schoenberg conceived it, it is not pitch itself that becomes tyrannical, but intervallic relations. Through all the transfor-

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> mations of the row, the intervallic relations remain absolutely unchanged, pre-empting all relationships of rhythm, dynamics, and timbre.

But once again we are forced back to "the priorities of hearing," to the fundamental fact that not one person in ten thousand can actually hear the organizing functions being performed by those intervallic relations: thus the vaunted "unity and diversity" exist only in the score or in the mind of the professional musician who has memorized or mastered the score, not in the ear of the common listener simply trying to follow the music's expressive content.

Rosen's earlier chapters are better. The best is the first one, "Expressionism," which provides some good solid cultural history of the sort that Rosen does quite well. Yet even here one has doubts. Janik and Toulmin make clear that what Rosen calls "the period hysteria which came as naturally to these artists as a classical reference did to an eighteenth-century poet," "the nightmarish anxiety of early-twentieth-century style," was more a specifically Viennese than a universally European phenomenon—and was in fact not shared by all Viennese artists of the time. Did Debussy or Stravinsky really experience the modernist "panic" of which Rosen writes so melodramatically? One could perhaps argue for it in isolated works like *Le Martyre de saint Sébastien* or *Petrushka*, but it does not seem to have been central to either composer's sensibility. Skryabin was a madman who at times thought he was Christ—which would seem to make him rather a special case. Mahler, a certified Viennese, was of course very neurotic, but his neuroses did not prevent the orderly and fruitful development of a great career—to say nothing of his conducting activities—that produced very un-expressionistic music and that was cut short only by physical illness. Rosen's view of Richard Strauss is also oddly melodramatic: "The operas *Salome* and *Electra* that he wrote in 1905 and 1908 are daring in their extreme chromaticism and in their representation of pathological states, but after *Electra* Strauss quickly retreated into eighteenth-century pastiche and the delicious Viennese pastry of *Der Rosenkavalier*. . . . What had frightened Strauss?" As I recall (from quite a distance) *Salome* and *Electra*, one thing wrong with them is that the *Schlagobers* music Strauss really wanted to write keeps popping up at inappropriate moments, destroying the intended, terribly somber Biblical-classical effect: in composing *Der Rosenkavalier*, surely a better opera despite its undeniable weaknesses, Strauss did not recoil in horror (or cowardice) from a glimpse into the abyss but rather discovered his true subject, the one to which the music he really wanted to write was ideally suited.

Rosen's next chapter, "Atonality," is very interesting for the view it presents of Schoenberg as a man. For Leibowitz and similar writers Schoenberg is a kind of John Wayne of music: the utterly fearless, steely-eyed hero who clearly comprehends, faces, and conquers each new challenge. Rosen's far more credible picture is of a deeply conflicted man, more conservative at heart and more thoroughly attached to tonality than

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any composer of his generation, and yet, because tonality could no longer provide (in Rosen's words) "total control over every element of the work," driven to abandon it: gradually at first, in the early atonal works, and then totally and with an almost monkish rigor, through the development of the twelve-tone method.

Yet again there are problems, this time about Rosen's description of the well-known "breakdown of tonality" (which, incidentally, he refers to as a "fiction" on p. 20 but which seems real enough on p. 27 and elsewhere). In attempting to trace the "movement toward the filling out of the chromatic scale" that eventually destroyed tonality, Rosen writes: "The tendency to fill out the chromatic space becomes naturally more marked by the middle of the nineteenth century: Liszt's music, for example, relies heavily on a continuous succession of the three diminished-seventh chords that map out the scale without redundancy; the second two-measure phrase of the Prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* of Wagner prominently displays the four notes of the chromatic scale that are omitted in the first. A missing note was a void, a moment of tension like a dissonance." Again this seems cheating. It is true that in the first phrase of *Tristan*, divided between cellos and oboe with wind accompaniment, the four notes C, C#, F#, and G appear neither in the melody nor the accompaniment; and it is also true that in the second phrase, divided between cellos and clarinet and again with wind accompaniment, these four notes all do appear. But they are certainly not "prominently displayed": they do not occur consecutively, and I very much doubt that anyone who has not examined the score with an eye to making Rosen's sort of special point has ever noticed their absence from the first phrase and their presence in the second. Schoenberg himself, in fact, singled out these two phrases in his essay "Criteria for the Evaluation of Music," in order to demonstrate the opposition between the "*developing variation*" he was seeking and the quite different sort of variation which Wagner was forced to use "in order to make his themes suitable for memorability, . . . sequences and semi-sequences, that is, unvaried or slightly varied repetitions differing in nothing essential fro n first appearances, except that they are exactly transposed to other degrees." That accurately describes what one hears at the beginning of *Tristan*: not a "void" being filled by the addition to the second phrase of those four missing notes but simply two parallel phrases, the second (except for the pick-up note) a minor third higher than the first. Moreover, there is, in the *Tristan* phrases, a good deal of the "redundancy" so sternly banished by Schoenberg: G#, for example, is stated by the oboe in the first phrase and then again by the cellos in the second before we have encountered an F#.

Finally, in the chapter on atonality there is an extended, and I think extremely unhelpful, analysis of Schoenberg's 1909 "monodrama" *Erwartung*. After repeated hearings and a close study of the score I continue to find *Erwartung* what I found it ten years ago: a prolonged, nightmarish scream, sustained for twenty-odd minutes with incredible instrumental ingenuity but no musical interest whatever. (I was therefore astonished to find Rosen referring to it as "one of the most effective, easily accessible, and immediately convincing of Schoenberg's works.") Rosen sets out to

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show that *Erwartung* is given unity by the frequent presence of a special kind of six-note chord, an example of which would be (in ascending order): G*b*, C, F, B, E, and B*b*. These chords, Rosen asserts, "make a very handsome sound." (Try that particular chord on your piano, starting with the G*b* below middle C, and see if you don't think the word "handsome" is just a chic cop-out on Rosen's part!) Anyhow, these chords are supposed all to "have a unified and easily recognizable chromatic sonority" (which they don't to my ears), to "fill the musical space of *Erwartung*" (which they may well do—but who cares?), and to "have obviously replaced the triad as the basic element of composition: their presence throughout the score gives them the stabilizing force previously possible only to the perfect triad." Which is like saying that the presence of high officials of the Mafia on every New York street corner would give them the stabilizing force previously expected of police officers. Once again "the priorities of hearing" assert themselves: these "handsome" chords of Schoenberg's (or Rosen's), even when they can be picked out by the ear amidst the enormous instrumental and contrapuntal complexity of *Erwartung*, don't sound in the least like triads and therefore can't do the work of triads. Moreover, they exist in a world totally different from that in which triads existed and did their work in earlier music: the whole system of gravitational forces that made tonality possible, and gave triads their stabilizing role, has been quite deliberately abandoned. It seems very doubtful whether positive analogies of this sort with earlier music—which always have a kind of now-you-see-it-now-you-don't quality—can illuminate *Erwartung* or Schoenberg's later music. (One is reminded of those jazz critics who are forever telling you that you aren't hearing what you know you are hearing: that Ornette Coleman is *really* just playing New Orleans street marches, and the like.)

So much for Rosen's book. I have left unmentioned only a brief, interesting chapter on the Society for the Private Performance of Music (*Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*) that Schoenberg founded and ran from 1918 to 1921. As must by now be clear, I was very disappointed by the book: if Rosen, not only the author of *The Classical Style* but also an acclaimed performer of very modern music, can't help me to listen to Schoenberg, who can? Certainly not the contributors to the twelve-tone house organ, *Perspectives of New Music*, who seem mainly to write owlish little articles about how masterfully the potentialities of this or that hexachord are exploited in this or that work. (A fair sampling of their writing may be found in *Perspectives on Schoenberg and Stravinsky*, ed. Benjamin Boretz and Edward T. Cone [Norton, 1972].) Such people write only for each other. Not that there is anything wrong with that: astrophysicists also presumably write only for each other. But no one confuses the writing of astrophysicists with criticism, and it is criticism of Schoenberg and of twelve-tone music in general that is badly needed and—though it seems incredible when one considers the very different situation in literature and the visual arts—virtually non-existent.

Instead of criticism, real criticism of the sort that Rosen provided in *The Classical Style* and that was earlier provided by men like Shaw and Tovey,

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the writing about twelve-tone music has been an uneasy mixture of propaganda and technical analysis. My wife recently suggested an illuminating parallel between Schoenberg and Pound: both were immensely and nobly active as intellectual catalysts and as promoters of younger artists who eventually produced work more popular and enduring than that of their mentors but who, admirably, never ceased to be loyal to them. Just as literary people (and especially poets) have tried for years to discover in Pound's *Cantos* the continuous, triumphant development that he (and others who must have known better) have always claimed was there, so musicians (and especially composers) have tried to see the same triumphant progress in Schoenberg's career. In the writing about Pound there has even been a feeble parallel to the sort of technical analysis practised by twelve-tone enthusiasts: all the phlumphing (perhaps begun by Eliot) about the fabulous "rhythmic invention" to be found in the *Cantos*. But it won't wash—in either case. Schoenberg's career is just as uneven and problematical as Pound's, though I think it ended more successfully (and certainly less pathetically) than Pound's did.

My intensive listening to Schoenberg these last few months has taught me a great deal: I have changed (and I hope opened) my mind towards his music far more than I expected to do, and have come to like more of it than I expected. *Pelleas und Melisande* (1902–03), in which the enormous post-Wagnerian orchestra is for the first time used with dizzying contrapuntal complexity, is a splendid, labyrinthine work. So is the somewhat more straightforward *Kammersymphonie* of 1906. I will probably carry my loathing of *Erwartung* with me to my grave, but I have become very fond of two atonal works written at almost exactly the same time (1908–09): the song-cycle *Das Buch der hängenden Gärten* and the *Five Orchestral Pieces*. As against the sustained vulgar hysteria of *Erwartung*, both of these works offer variety, contrast, and freedom. (You can scarcely find a triad in *Erwartung*, as Rosen points out; but the piano accompaniment to *Das Buch* is full of them, sensitively and suggestively placed.) Since I have always loved *Pierrot Lunaire*, I was delighted to find some (though less) of the same fantastic charm in the *Serenade* of 1923.

I have had more trouble with the twelve-tone works. The *Variations for Orchestra* seem dreary and academic, cheap melodrama alternating with mooning sentimentality, the creaking machinery of the variation process always painfully in view. But there is genuine energy and wit in the *Suite* (1926), the Third String Quartet (1926–27), and the slightly earlier Wind Quintet (1924), in which, now and then (and, I gather on good authority, in strict accordance with The Rules), one or another instrument will suddenly (and delightfully) rattle off a pure diatonic scale. I must add, however, that these three works all seem to me somewhat too long and rather garrulous. The opera *Moses und Aron* (1932) I have found repellent, but it is a long and complex (though unfinished) work, and I have not had sufficient opportunity to study it. The Fourth String Quartet (1937) I continue to find a stolid and effect-ridden piece. But in the best of the later works Schoenberg seems to be using the twelve-tone language with greater expressivity and freedom than in the works of the 20's, even with a certain

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"romantic" expansiveness, yet with greater economy and without the earlier garrulity. The ones I have derived ever greater pleasure from are the Violin Concerto (1937), the Piano Concerto (1942), the String Trio (1946), and the Fantasy for Violin and Piano (1949).

At this point I would find it very difficult—as others evidently have also done—to give precise verbal expression to the pleasure these works have given me or to trace its causes. But I am very sure that it is not related to the manipulations of the tone-row in the way that my pleasure in (say) a late Haydn first movement certainly is related to his manipulations of tonality and sonata form. I was glad to learn that this opinion is shared by Joseph Silverstein, the brilliant concertmaster of the Boston Symphony, who has given the finest performances of the Violin Concerto I have heard. In fact, Schoenberg himself, unlike his admirers and drum-beaters, evidently came to think of the twelve-tone method exclusively as a method of compositional construction that had little or nothing to do with hearing or analysis. All I can say now is that in the late Schoenberg works I have come (tentatively) to enjoy, he somehow manages to transcend what I earlier described as the characteristic expressive limitations of twelve-tone music and to create continuously interesting expressive forms.

Shaw once wrote that you should not express an opinion on a performance of a musical work until you had had ten years' critical experience of the work itself. I used to think this an awfully stodgy pronouncement, but now it seems to me generally right (though I stick to my guns about the Maazel concert). I have therefore abstained from recommending particular recordings of Schoenberg works. One would think that Boulez, Craft, and the Juilliard Quartet would be reliable enough guides, but two of the professionals I consulted, Silverstein and Professor Joel Sheveloff of Boston University, did not agree. Both said that virtually all performances of Schoenberg are unsatisfactory, largely because orchestral musicians hate to play him. Silverstein went so far as to say that, given the Schoenberg works I have come to like, he could guarantee that I would also like the *Variations for Orchestra* if I were ever to hear a performance of it that had the tonal beauty customarily lavished on a work like Brahms's Fourth Symphony.

In conclusion I should like to mention a very interesting work, one of Rosen's (and, in an odd way, my own) favorites, the *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielscene* of 1930 (not written to accompany any actual film scene). It is brief and elegantly constructed, and the titles of its three short movements embody, almost too perfectly, the limited expressive range of most twelve-tone music: Threatening Danger, Fear, Catastrophe. One can't help wondering if Schoenberg felt driven to indulge himself in a moment of sublime self-parody. The snarling trombones and high violin tremolos so vividly bring to mind Joan Crawford's anguished face, slot-mouthed and brow-plucked, that there seems a divine fitness in the fact that Western Music's Composer of Destiny wound up in Hollywood.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

American Composition Now

THE AVANT-GARDE IS ALWAYS WITH US—or has been, at least, since contemporary high culture and the attitudes that buttress it were spawned in the Salon des Refusés more than a century ago. In spite of the quickening pace at which a novelty-hungry nation of culture consumers thrusts aside yesterday's tastes and embraces the new, that small band of the untrammelled continues to elude even hastily agreed-upon classifications; it regroups, redefines its aims, reclaims its position on the leading edge of cultural tendencies, and plunges headlong toward future notoriety.

Patently, the matter is not that simple. Now, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, America has reached the point where the avant-garde is more a received idea than a perceived reality. Intellectual habit insists upon it, and we go in search of it, subjecting every fad and fancy to intense scrutiny for its potential ability to undermine the status quo. But the catch is that the status quo itself is equivocal, so permeated with the idea of its own ephemerality that it gives the avant-garde nothing to batter itself against. Ever since—to choose the musical equivalent of that moment in the graphic arts represented by the Salon des Refusés—Igor Stravinsky was canonized for fomenting a riot in the Theâtre des Champs-Elysées with the premiere (1913) of his *Rite of Spring,* the only orthodoxy of any long standing in our musical life has been that there shall be no orthodoxy.

There have, of course, been partial and candidate orthodoxies, perilously grasping at the levers of power—the schools, the music critics, the intelligentsia, the foundation boards—and hoping for a brief joyride before the inevitable fall. This is, indeed what has just happened to the most recent of these attempts, the one that was perhaps the most pervasive since the self-conscious Americanism of the Thirties. I am referring to the total serialism symbolized in Europe by Pierre Boulez and in this country by Milton Babbitt, now pretty thoroughly displaced as the Seventies wane. Its successor on the other side of the Atlantic, the eclectic—though principally electronic—gigantism of Karlheinz Stockhausen, has never really taken hold here, perhaps because we lack any apparatus similar to the German state-owned radio networks through which Stockhausen secured the means to perform, broadcast, and record his larger works. So, more than at any time since the early Fifties, American musical composition is characterized by a profusion of styles, each with an almost equal likelihood of turning up on the program of a front-rank orchestra, ensemble, or choral group somewhere in the nation.

Matching the profusion of styles is a profusion of performing organizations that present contemporary music at least occasionally to their audiences. " The Contemporary Music Performing Directory" published by the American Music Center in 1975 lists more than sixty of these in

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California alone, their varied provinces being "chamber or choral music, jazz, new or experimental music, multi-media and electronic" works. Such groups range from duos and trios up to sophisticated ensembles such as the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, with a permanent core of 24 musicians (full orchestras are omitted); many, of course, owe their existence to university music departments, but perhaps an equal number do not. Though most of the groups in the listing perform music of all eras, some devote their programs entirely to twentieth-century music, and go so far as to commission scores: what composer of any time would not envy the man whose work was to be given its premiere by the superb chamber ensemble called Speculum Musicae, spearheaded by two outstanding musicians, the pianist Ursula Oppens and the cellist Fred Sherry. Similar encouragement for today's composer comes from such institutions as the Kitchen in New York City, which provides time, space, and financial support for new and experimental music, and the management firm Young Concert Artists, under the direction of Susan Wadsworth, which commissions works to be given first performances by its clients. Add to all this such undertakings as the National Endowment for the Arts's "round-robin" commission series, in which each of a number of orchestras agrees to commission a work that, after its premiere, will be played in turn by all of them, and it seems likely that diverse audiences are hearing more new music in something resembling professional performances than at any time in our history.

That jazz appears in the "Contemporary Music Performing Directory" is also symptomatic of the times. The gradual retreat of serialism, with its assignment of hieratic status to the composer and his painstaking manipulation of music's raw materials, and the steady if somewhat tepid interest in the Cage-derived aleatory or chance music that survived the experiments of the Sixties have converged in a fresh appreciation of improvisation. And many jazz artists, isolated from the mainstream of popular music by the flood tide of rock, followed the lead of John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and others in the mid-Sixties into the kind of harmonic and rhythmic complexity and formal innovation that their "classical" counterparts had been chasing through the academies for decades. Though the "Third Stream" music Gunther Schuller wanted to midwife as much as fifteen years ago—a style sired by American popular idiom on European tradition—has yet to emerge from the womb, the parties to the union seem closer together than ever before.

Where in all this multifarious composing activity is the avant-garde? It *has* been identified by some commentators, and labelled the SoHo group and the minimalist school. Its central figure appears at the moment to be Philip Glass, perhaps because of the splash made by *Einstein on the Beach,* his collaboration with Robert Wilson that capped a string of successful European presentations with two sold-out performances at the Metropolitan Opera House in November of 1976. Glass is not a young man: now forty, he has been working his stylistic vein for a decade or more. At the outset, in the early Sixties in New York, he was associated with Terry Riley and Steve Reich, two other composers who remain at the center of

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the school even though the three have severed ties. Theirs is music that depends on just a few cellular rhythmic and melodic figures stated quite simply and then repeated at incantatory length, subject only to the most gradual variation, until such variation accumulates into a perceived shift of the planes of the sound. There are no climaxes, no contrasting instrumental colors, no harmonic modulations (though the cells themselves may be built on the diatonic scale and contain basic harmonic relationships)—there is no development in the traditional sense. As Glass has written about his work in *Another Look at Harmony:*

> Neither memory nor anticipation . . . have a place in sustaining the texture, quality or reality of the musical experience. It is hoped that one would then be able to perceive the music almost as a "presence," freed of dramatic structure, a pure medium of sound.

To play his music, Glass—like Reich and others—has assembled his own group of musicians, who tour with him and in a large sense collaborate in the generation of his scores: electric organs, amplified wind instruments, and voices. In Glass's recent work his engineer is one of the ensemble, sitting at a control panel onstage and mixing the amplified sounds.

In a number of ways the music of Glass and his counterparts has its origins in the art, the writings, and the example of John Cage. It is not hard to sense in the current wave of activity Cage's interest in non-Western musics, particularly the cyclical and additive music of the Far East, and in Oriental philosophy—and in fact most acknowledge their debt to Cage and to non-Western music of one stripe or another. (Other progenitors are LaMonte Young and Morton Feldman, both of whom were writing long, static, sometimes almost inaudible works in the late Fifties and early Sixties.) But there are differences: unlike the hermetic Cage, the teleological thrust of whose work seemed to be silence—a state it attained occasionally, in fact—the new minimalists write for a rich, full ensemble of instruments, playing for the most part very loudly, and the apparent intention of their art is to induce and maintain a fixed spiritual state rather than, like Cage's, to negate art itself and all its affective content. And the minimalists, too, *compose* their scores, drawing upon the counsel of the players in their ensembles; little is left to chance.

Hypnotic as some of this music is, it is difficult to imagine what can grow out of it. Like those of other such movements since World War II, its aesthetic priorities seem to restrict severely the field of play for the composing imagination and thus threaten to be self-consuming. But while it lasts the school is diverting, and seems for the moment to have turned the attention of the young away from the studio and the canning of synthesized sound onto tape, and back to performance before an audience, employing acoustic instruments—among which, of course, synthesizers and electronic signal processors may find a place.

But even if minimalism should spread like wildfire through musical and intellectual circles, it is unlikely that its champions could do any more than jostle the current idols. Chief among these is Elliott Carter, who will

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reach the age of seventy this year. Since elevation to his current eminence in the early Sixties—his *Second String Quartet* (1959) and *Double Concerto for Harpsichord, Piano, and Two Chamber Orchestras* (1961) were probably the pivotal works in the explosion of his reputation—each new score in his slender production has been awaited with high expectation and duly received with awe and rapture. He has won the important prizes and garnered commissions from such as the New York Philharmonic and the Juilliard String Quartet. He is the reigning symbol of the establishment, and has remained so probably because his music, in addition to being superbly crafted, full of dynamic and timbral contrast, and very dense of texture even for contemporary music, belongs to no school and yet challenges no significant current academic or intellectual precept. It is atonal—Carter flirted with Coplandesque Americanism in the Thirties (*Pocahontas* was a revealing early title) but soon went his own way—and guided by external conceptualization about the properties of the medium rather than propelled through traditional formal structures. Like many contemporary composers, Carter concerns himself with the interplay of sonorities, but he never stops there: his preoccupations of late have included the divorce of separate instruments or instrumental choirs in an ensemble—two string pairs in the *Third Quartet* (1971) and the three groups in the *Symphony of Three Orchestras*, one of the National Endowment for the Arts Bicentennial commissions—from one another in metrical progress, each plying its own course through "metrical modulation" and intersecting with one another only occasionally on the way to the common close. The resulting music has a propulsiveness and surface drama that are seldom matched by Carter's composing colleagues, but it is hardly ingratiating to the ear, and the knotty, thickly layered textures demand of the auditor a steady intensity of concentration that imposes a considerable strain and can interfere with the perception of the whole. Even after repeated listening to his major works, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Carter's distinction may lie more in the concepts that infuse his works than in the audible results of these concepts; with the best will in the world, a listener may find that the curtains refuse to part and reveal the interior life of the music.

With Carter in the current pantheon is George Crumb, a composer whose style is more immediately approachable, less intellectually rarefied, and more representative of current American compositional predispositions. Rather plain and even austere of texture, often allusive—to traditional composers and styles, to folk song—and heightened by the use of exotic instruments and devices for altering the sound of standard forces (Carter seldom employs anything but the traditional sounds of standard acoustic instruments), Crumb's music has drawn public attention to the successor to serialism among America's academic elite. Though Crumb and those who share his predilections—another is Richard Wernick, whose *Visions of Terror and Wonder* won last year's Pulitzer Prize—have issued no manifestoes, it is obvious that their aim is to reach the affections as much as the viscera or the rational faculties with an expressivity not alien to that of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century masters. Few have

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rallied to the most vocal apostate from serialism, George Rochberg, who publicly renounced it several years ago and now writes in a fashion that recalls Brahms, Mahler, and Bartók rather too strongly for comfort. But Crumb and his allies have staked out a position, and it is a clear challenge to the surviving strongholds of serialism.

Some of the most winning music to be heard in our concert halls recently seems to be seeking an even more inclusive synthesis of tradition and contemporary concerns. The Bicentennial commission that attracted the most attention was not Carter's *Symphony* but David Del Tredici's *Final Alice*, a *tour de force* for "amplified soprano/narrator" and large orchestra. Del Tredici's composing career has lately revolved around Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*; *Final Alice* is based loosely upon the trial scene that makes up the last two chapters of *Wonderland*. Within a pastiche of instrumental and vocal sections it incorporates five arias sung by the soloist, the first four in the guise of the White Rabbit, who presents them as "evidence" at the trial, and the fifth straight, as if voiced by Carroll himself. The fourth aria, which Del Tredici calls the "heart" of the work, is a setting of *Alice Gray*, a sentimental Victorian poem that Carroll parodied ("O my heart, my heart is breaking/ For the love of Alice Gray"), and is intended to symbolize Carroll's love for the girl Alice Pleasance Liddell, to whom his books were addressed. The first letters of each line of the final aria, a setting of Carroll's acrostic poem, spell out the girl's name. The work is full of musical parody—but self-parody, not the kind of parody Crumb might work on a Mahler fragment. For instance, the *Alice Gray* tune—and it is just that, not a melody—is an *idée fixe* that has ramifications throughout the piece, enhancing the hysterical, hallucinatory character of many of its passages. And though it serves well, it, like much of Del Tredici's material, is not very well suited to the really extended development the composer subjects it to (the piece lasts nearly an hour). That points to the problem of scale, too: some of Carroll's delicate wit is submerged in Del Tredici's strenuous and lavish treatment. But wherever the work was played it was tumultuously received, in no small part because of the versatile and affecting Barbara Hendricks, whose performance in the central role would have been admirable for its display of stamina even if it had had nothing else to recommend it.

Even closer to routine concert-hall expectations was the *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* by John Corigliano, Jr., whose father was concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic for many years. The work was one of the orchestra's commissions for its first-desk men heard in Avery Fisher Hall last fall, and Stanley Drucker played the solo part with great skill and fluency. The composer writes,

> Knowing [Drucker's] special gifts enabled me to write music of unprecedented difficulty for the solo instrument, and gave me the idea that generates the first movement: the opening cadenza.

And, in fact, the imaginative extension of the idea of the cadenza is sufficient to bear the weight of a movement of symphonic scope. The slow

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movement, an elegy for the composer's father, takes the form of a dialogue between clarinet and violin, and verges on but never sinks into banality because of the masterly manipulation of line and texture. The final section, an "antiphonal toccata," deploys brass and wind instruments in the side boxes of the hall for some of the contrasts implied by its title, and is a sometimes subtle, sometimes raucous display of orchestral virtuosity and massed power. Despite its occasional weaknesses—like many contemporaries, Corigliano expects too much of percussive sounds—the work is informed by a musical imagination of the first order, one that seems on the evidence of this piece to be *truly* untrammelled. The prospect of observing such talents as Corigliano's and Del Tredici's grow and expand is something a poor scribbler on the musical sidelines can be grateful for.

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JOHN SIMON

Theater Chronicle

LAST SEASON, BY SOME MIRACLE, Broadway ended up in the black. Jubilation swept across the Rialto: the theater was saved and God (or Mammon) was in his heaven. Even assuming that one swallow makes a summer, and one Broadway a national theater—both preposterous assumptions—there remains the fact that the offerings that seem to have reversed the downward trend were in no significant way better than (or even different from) the shows that used to keep the Great White Way in the red. The inevitable conclusion is that the reason for the windfall is not intrinsic but adventitious—that it depends on some such extraneous factor as perhaps a bad year for the movies or an even greater dissatisfaction with television.

However that may be, the pathetic state of Broadway theater—and, for that matter, regional theater, inasmuch as the play I am about to mention had successful runs in Los Angeles and New Haven before coming to Broadway—is epitomized by the case of *The Shadow Box*. This alleged drama by the actor-playwright Michael Cristofer won both the Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award, and made a more than respectable showing in the voting for the third major award, given by the the New York drama critics. It takes place in three cottages for the terminally ill on the grounds of a large hospital, in each of which an allegedly archetypal patient is dying in his or her own quirky way. To make things jazzier, one cottage represents all three cottages, the characters from one being largely confined to the porch; from the second, to the living room; from the third, to the kitchen. But there is also some actual interpenetration of the same space by all three groups, a device invented by Alan Ayckbourn in *How the Other Half Loves*, which may have worked once in a particular farce, but which is showing signs of undue proliferation—possibly because it saves space and additional set design and so cuts production costs.

In Cottage One, there is Joe, an average Joe from New Jersey, with his frustrated, griping wife who has never forgiven him for not making good, even though they have survived decently and have a guitar-playing son to prove it. In Cottage Two, there is a noble, intellectual homosexual flanked by his cast-off wife and picked-up hustler lover. Though the divorced wife has turned into a promiscuous playgirl and the hustler is in attendance mostly for the sake of an inheritance, the latter at least is converted by the homosexual's noble dying into a true friend and better person. In Cottage Three, a semi-demented, moribund crone is tyrannizing an unloved daughter who has been magnanimously writing her letters in the name of another beloved daughter, who ran away from home and hasn't been heard from since. The old woman, believing the factitious letters, keeps alive in the hope of her favorite's imminent return. Meanwhile the unloved daughter is slowly lapsing into bitterness.

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The author could have more appropriately named these cottages—instead of One, Two, and Three—Miller, Albee, and Williams Cottage. But perhaps his nomenclature was right after all, for this is certainly playwriting by the numbers. Not only is the action in each cottage a full-blown piece of eclecticism, but also the very dialogue is at best derivative, at worst garishly ostentatious. Moreover, the mentality displayed is unpleasantly misogynistic, what with the central female character in each cottage a bit of a beast, and the two principal men extremely decent fellows, joined at last in goodness even by the redeemed male whore. Mostly, though, the problem is that none of this rings true. The good are too good, the bitchy too bitchy, and I, for one, did not for a moment believe that the author has really comprehended the effect of oncoming death on any of his characters. He has made everything even more grandiose—and faintly obscene—by introducing The Interviewer, who is intended as a sort of cross between a staff psychiatrist and God. This character, who apparently listens in simultaneously on all three bugged cottages, is always there interrogating either the dying or their next-of-kin, sometimes over a loudspeaker, sometimes in person. The concept is doubly odious: first, because it is clearly a shabby shortcut for the author to draw out the characters in an essentially nondramatic way; secondly, because it suggests a hospital that surpasses even actual hospitals in inhumanity with a Big Brother always listening, watching, pestering with prying questions.

Gordon Davidson's direction, Ming Cho Lee's setting, and the acting by all but two or three cast members managed to be equally routine, with three performances especially offensive. But all this is unimportant; what matters is that a shoddy play meretriciously designed to strike critics and audiences dumb with awe before its Great Theme, did not begin to do justice to its subject. If *The Shadow Box* is the best dramatic fare it has to offer, Broadway deserves to die in whichever cottage it chooses.

The end of last season also produced three successful musicals that are still, as I write, with us. *I Love My Wife* purported to be something very original indeed, and it is innovative to the extent that it has a cast of four principals plus a chorus of four more who play various minor roles and several instruments, and are thus also the show's orchestra. This invention has some charm, but that is about as far as the charm goes, and, for that matter, the invention. For the rest, it is a plodding little show about two petty bourgeois couples who try their hand at a little wife-swapping, which, naturally in such clean-dirty-joke-riddled fare, comes to nothing. The humor is on the level of this remark by a wife to the other's husband during the feast preceding the supposed orgy: "Wally, I'm going to give you a big piece [of banana pie]: I want to make sure you'll have plenty of banana." That is from the book by Michael Stewart; now get this equally tasty morsel from Stewart's lyrics (which Cy Coleman has condignly set to uninspired music): "If we cut loose and have a ball/ With orgies relatively small / [It's] Because it is Trenton, after all, / And not Gomorrah." Well, now, a musical about Gomorrah might be something at that; instead, most of what Broadway gets is of, for, and, for all practical purposes, by Trenton.

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For a little more sophistication, to be sure, there is *Side by Side by Sondheim*. But this is only a retread: they take a bunch of Steven Sondheim songs from various shows held together by some part-relevant, part-irrelevant chatter from a jocular M.C., get one man and two women to perform the songs to a two-piano accompaniment, and think they have got themselves a Broadway show. And, by George, they've got it. The reviewers are ecstatic about the material, and deeply touched that four Britishers are doing it (since the opening, though, the cast has been half-Americanized); the audiences think this is the last word in wicked wittiness, and lap it all up. Now, some of these songs hold up very well, some rather cry out for a show to go with, and some would have been better left unresuscitated. The one revelation the songs offer when heard *en masse* is their distinctly homosexual flavor, sometimes with, sometimes without Albertine strategy, less evident in smaller quantities and within the contexts of a given show.

The only Broadway musical of any distinction that opened in 1977 is *Annie*. Based on *Little Orphan Annie,* but very freely adapted, this is the sort of good old-fashioned show three or four of which ought to be running on Broadway at any given time. There is no stylistic innovation here of any kind; everything is tried and true and skillful even if lacking in ultimate distinction. To start with Thomas Meehan's book, here is Daddy Warbucks reminiscing: "By the time I was 23, I made my first million, and in ten years I turned that into a hundred million—in those days that was a lot of money . . . I realized you don't have to be nice to people you meet on the way up the ladder if you're not coming down again." Clearly this is humor a cut above *I Love My Wife*'s, although here, too, we get the inevitable New Jersey joke. But at least the general procedure is a welcome reversal. Whereas most musical adaptations take more ambitious material and reduce it to comic strips, *Annie* starts with a cartoon and has nowhere to go but up. And it does: in the somewhat glib but occasionally genuinely catchy score by Charles Strouse, which only once sounds rather Kurt Weillish (and then not unpleasantly so); in the functional, even if not outstanding, lyrics of Martin Charnin who also directed more than competently—there is something charming about handing over, at one point, the entire large stage of the Alvin Theater to Sandy, the dog, a splendid mutt. He is, I am told, not really very intelligent, but that no more prevents a canine actor from being good than it does a human one.

There is a wonderful trio of villains headed by Miss Hannigan, who runs Annie's orphanage, and who hates her little wards with a grand, comic passion that borders on the metaphysical. And there is a sextet of orphans (other than Annie herself) who are conceived along sufficiently rowdy lines to be uncloying. There is even a comic Franklin Roosevelt and his Cabinet complete with a straight-man Ickes ("Harold, I don't want to hear so much as a 'gosh' from you!") as well as a Daddy Warbucks who is not dripping with goodness, only bloody decent for a tycoon, and who says things like, "Yes, I know he's a Democrat, but he's a human being too!"

There are lovely performances across the board. Dorothy Loudon is a hilarious Miss Hannigan, a martyr to her malevolence, her cussedness transfiguring her countenance as a fiery death does a saint's. Reid Shelton

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is a grand Warbucks, full of that ingratiating sort of authoritativeness that comes as naturally to the irreversibly rich as harp-playing to an angel. Sandy Faison is graceful as his gal Friday, and it is a good idea that Andrea McArdle, the Annie, should be a plain, sturdy pre-adolescent, poised but not precious, quick but not sassy. There is, however, one girl of seven (by now probably eight), Danielle Brisebois, who is such an outrageously, self-assuredly adorable dancer, singer, actress, and moppet that she should, by all rights, bring out the curmudgeon in all of us. Yet, I wager, she could have gotten herself adopted by W. C. Fields.

Add to this good, simple dances by Peter Gennaro; apt costumes by Theoni V. Aldredge; generous lighting by a welcome new designer, Judy Rasmusen; and, above all, truly spectacular sets by David Mitchell that nevertheless remain always miraculously unostentatious, and you have yourself a real show; not art, certainly, but theater and a welcome fillip to the disposition.

The 1977-78 season has produced three straight plays that have so far maintained themselves on Broadway (a feeble television comedy, *An Almost Perfect Person* is just barely hanging in on the strength of Colleen Dewhurst's performance in the lead). Of the three, easily the worst is William Gibson's *Golda*. This is an attempt at a historico-biographical study of the Yom Kippur War and Mrs. Meir's life story. But that life is not well known, and all Gibson can get from it is a few conventional scenes of career versus domesticity, of decent but conventional husband against decent but mission-filled wife. These alternate uneasily with scenes in Golda's office, in which various military and political advisers and assorted underlings run around this way and that spouting contradictory counsels, while Golda, cool-headed and poker-faced, cracks some Jewish jokes.

Two further problems are strategy and language. Modern warfare and the politics surrounding it are complex matters indeed, and virtually impossible to dramatize. If instead of meaningless projections of war scenes, there had been slides explaining the strategy involved (as Walter Kerr, among others, suggested), it could have helped a little. As it is, we never got a clear sense of what is going on, and the periodic messages of doom that kept coming in over the red phone from unspecified sources reminded me of that old vaudeville routine where the person on the phone keeps repeating ever more gravely, "You don't say!" hangs up, and, when asked who that was, replies, "He didn't say." As for language, Gibson's is not very powerful at best: here he has Golda and the others speak in a kind of Yiddish syntax full of inversions surely inapplicable to Hebrew (which they are supposed to be speaking), and this, along with Jewish inflections, contributed to an atmosphere of ghetto melodrama or farce. Anne Bancroft made the most of the part of Mrs. Meir, whose emotional range scarcely exceeded two notes. Having to wander through her youth and middle-age in the physical appearance of the elderly premier of Israel (in excellent make-up, by the way) only added to a sense of incongruity, which this play could ill afford. (In the film *8 1/2*, where the device seems to have first caught on, the *dépaysement* may have been an actual asset.) Arthur Penn's direction did nothing to hold a large cast of undistin-

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guished to bad supporting actors together; a good thing that this motley crew were not the actual defenders of Israel.

The Gin Game is a maiden effort by D. L. Coburn, an advertising man living in Dallas. This two-character comedy-drama—more comedy than drama, but not very much of either—concerns two lonely figures in an old people's home. Weller Martin, a gin-rummy enthusiast, teaches Fonsia Dorsey to play the game, and, until the final curtain, they are either playing, or getting ready to play, or arguing about why they are not playing. A strange thing happens—but not so strange for those who know *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead,* whence it is derived: the novice Fonsia keeps winning, thus precipitating quarrels in the course of which the oldsters tell each other some bitter truths about their self-delusions. Is this enough for a two-act play? Yes, if you can make do with some expert ensemble playing by the acting couple Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy (both very good, although Miss Tandy plays her part a bit too young); if you can revel in Mike Nichols's adroit, perfectly paced staging; and if you want to learn the rules of gin rummy. I would personally have preferred a play about poker, because I already know how to play gin rummy.

The season's most successful revival will surely turn out to be *Dracula,* which is not so much a horror show as a horror of a show. This Hamilton Deane-John L. Balderston dramatization of the Bram Stoker novel returned to us exactly half a century after its premiere, and seems, like its vampire protagonist, desperately in need of a little blood. For what we are given is mostly a piece of bloodless camp, lacking even the courage of its effete convictions. It begins as the heroine, Lucy, sashays onto the stage and listens with exaggerated rapture to the phonograph playing a popular song while she sips some cherry cordial. The song and perhaps even the phonograph are anachronistic, and the whole scene smacks of early Cole Porter, with which the show has nothing in common. The cordial is the campiest thing of all: a spot of blood red in a tableau of blacks, grays, and whites, the only colors of the entire *mise en scène.* The sets and costumes, based on sketches by Edward Gorey, espouse this monochrome; they are, in fact, the usual macabre pen-in-ink Gorey-Gothic miniatures blown up to enormous size—especially in height, seeming to go up and up forever. But what is quite amusing *in parvo* is not necessarily as pleasing when cross-hatched large. A misshapen dwarf was the delight of many a Renaissance court, but rare indeed must have been the prince who displayed a misshapen giant for his guests' delectation. And Gorey, of course, went all out for bats: bat-winged *putti* over Lucy's canopied bed; bats all around her father's, Dr. Seward's, sanatorium library; bats even on the patients' uniforms. This simply does not work either as Gothic horror or as camp. Horror, too, has its rules, its decorum: Dr. Seward's sanatorium is *not* Dracula's castle. Or, to put it another way, a bat in the belfry is worth a hundred in the boudoir. But it doesn't work as camp either, because a gag that is built into the set or costumes is permanently there, does not evaporate like a word or action. If the business and dialogue do not always match and even surpass the costumes and décor in campiness, the design ends up fighting the dramaturgy.

Dennis Rosa's direction is always obvious: even the scary stage effects

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are not surprising and, above all, not inscrutable enough—one can see, for instance, that it is not the same bat pulled up along one wire that darts out of the window along another. But the human actors are not even up to the props. Frank Langella's Dracula, for example, looks and moves as he should, and has the right amount of eroticism, but, unfortunately, even more autoeroticism. Langella is one of the most narcissistic performers around, and seems, in general, much more interested in drawing the audience's adulation than the heroine's blood. The others are all bad in different ways that do not even blend into a consistent ensemble badness; only Alan Coates, a young English actor, is a fine Jonathan Harker: handsome, manly, and not defeated by either script or direction. To cap it all, the music is generally much too loud, yet not loud enough to drown out the dialogue. Still, almost all critics prostrated themselves before this foolishness, and audiences seem to lap it up with a positively ghoulish ecstasy. Such cutenesses as the fact that every new set in *grisaille* features a small red spot somewhere (say, a rosebud in a vase) have them roaring. Well, there is one line at least that seems to apply equally to what goes on on stage and in the audience: "I say, Miss, this is a queer neighborhood."

Meanwhile, off-Broadway, there is a slightly updated and generally rewritten version of the play, entitled *The Passion of Dracula*. This offers some genuine laughs, some good and mystifying stage effects, and quite a few savory performances, notably Giulia Pagano's beleaguered heroine. But even if New York audiences may be ready for two concurrent Draculas, I am not, so let me proceed to another Broadway revival, *Tartuffe,* which was given the usual limited run at the Circle in the Square. It starred John Wood, that renowned British comic actor; had a theoretically solid supporting cast of Americans; and was directed by Stephen Porter, a specialist in urbane comedy. It sounded promising, but turned out to be a mitigated disaster. The one thing that proved indestructible in its wit, verve, and refinement was Richard Wilbur's translation. But even this elegant, tripping verse was not particularly well spoken by most actors.

Let us consider how some of the main roles were acted (and directed). Wood played Tartuffe as a fanatical, barefoot friar with long, grizzled and matted hair (surely the wrong apparel and appearance, that of an aging ecclesiastical flower child gone to seed), totally ascetic on the outside, but no less lecherous and nasty when he feels he can drop his disguise. This Tartuffe was hardly the great hypocrite, and his animalistic nature accorded ill with the self-control needed to be even a middling, let alone a master, dissembler. Orgon was well enough played by Stefan Gierasch as a rather lumbering, stupid fellow; but if the Tartuffe had been subtler, we could have had a more interestingly complex Orgon. Swoosie Kurtz played Mariane as a nasty little bitch (homely to boot!), and Peter Coffield was orotund and hollow as Cléonte. Nothing short of disastrous was the Elmire of Tammy Grimes, who looks more and more mannish and whose delivery is more and more mannered. No threatened, delicate Elmire this, but a caustic battle-ax, an attitudinizing harridan. Patricia Elliott would have been a fine Dorine, but for the irritating way of eliding

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her rhymes, as if she were ashamed not to be talking in sensible prose. Victor Garber's Valère and Mildred Dunnock's Mme Pernelle were all right. When you add the surprisingly crude direction by Stephen Porter, allowing, for instance, for the famous tabletop seduction scene to be played almost in the nude, nearly as a comic rape, you have a not very distinguished *Tartuffe,* whose very scenery and costumes, by Zack Brown, were only adequate.

Two dramas of a more ambitious sort did not outlast the week in which they opened. *The Night of the Tribades* was an interesting idea by the reputable Swedish novelist Per Olov Enquist: a semidocumentary play about Strindberg helping to direct his estranged wife, Siri von Essen, in an avant-garde theater they started in Copenhagen in 1889. The venture proved a triple failure: it did not confirm Strindberg's reputation as an important playwright; it did not give Siri a new lease on an acting career (after one performance of the newly-written *The Stronger,* the theater closed); and it did not reconcile the spouses, who soon thereafter got divorced. Enquist's chief invention, besides using the actor Viggo Schiwe as Siri's assistant director (Strindberg suspected him of being Siri's lover, but Enquist does not follow this tack) is to have Marie Caroline David, an alcoholic lesbian, play the silent woman in this production of *The Stronger.* She may have been, as Strindberg believed, Siri's lover; certainly, the women later lived together until Marie's death from tuberculosis.

Enquist's play is based to a considerable extent on Strindberg's letters, journals, and other writings, but there is also a good deal of Enquist's invention in it. This combination may not be a felicitous one: it is arguably better, or at least easier, to put together a play entirely from documents; or else to read up on all the available material and then forget it and write an original work. Be that as it may, what we get here is a great deal of biographical rehashing of how the Strindbergs met the free-living, alcoholic Marie at an artists' colony in France, and of other events leading up to the particular night at the Dagmar Theater in Copenhagen. After the rehashing comes a stream of recrimination, but there is still no stage action until a very effective *coup de théâtre* near the very end, when Siri proceeds to read a speech from *The Stronger* in which Mrs. X., the wife, hatefully accuses Miss Y. of having stolen her husband. Siri now delivers this "hate monologue" with altered tones as a declaration of love to Marie before the flabbergasted Strindberg. It is a great piece of theater, but it does not save the play, which has many awkward patches of one or two characters unconvincingly effacing themselves while the remaining ones have at one another. Undoubtedly, this bit of marital inferno resembles a play by Strindberg, but a rather inferior one.

Its problem, of course, is context: what may be appropriate and powerful in a letter, for example, may not be either of those things on stage—hysterical, perhaps, without being histrionic in the right sense. Still, good direction and acting could have gone a long way to fill in gaps and smooth over roughnesses. But Michael Kahn is neither a strong nor a very imaginative director, and the stellar cast proved a miscalculation. As Siri, Bibi Andersson had some trouble with her English, though this was the

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least of it. More to the point, she seems to have reached that awkward age where she is no longer able to capitalize on the wonderful sweetness she could exude so heart-meltingly; yet the tough, bitchy side of the part scared her, and made her play unduly against it. Max von Sydow, probably in part hampered by not having a fierce enough adversary, gave a stiff, brittle performance, often quite mechanical, with occasional moments of that genius of his we admire in the cinema. His English has only one fault: it is too good, sounding neither British nor American, but like the very Platonic idea of the English language. As Viggo, Werner Klemperer played too much for laughs, but had his moments; Eileen Atkins was nicely sardonic as Marie, able to convey a great deal with a word or two and a shrewdly composed expression—but, then, hers was the easiest role, and she, moreover, was the only native speaker of English in the cast.

Then there was *The Merchant,* the worthy Arnold Wesker's response to *The Merchant of Venice*. It seems that Wesker was trying to direct a production of Shakespeare's play in a manner that would make Shylock into a sympathetic character, but found this unfeasible, whereupon he sat down and wrote his own version of the play. There ought to be at least two lessons in this. The lesson for directors: do not try to tamper with your author's intentions; if the play is worth reviving, it is worth respecting. The lesson for playwrights, who declare that Shakespeare himself cribbed from all over: literature is like crime—the greater man can steal from the lesser with impunity, but try the reverse and you come to grief.

The Merchant, though not without a certain intelligence behind it, is clearly a polemic, and should have been written as an essay. What we got was a combination of fairly low ghetto comedy mixed with philosophizing full of historic hindsight (this sort of thing is pitifully easy—"No, my dear Columbus, you will never reach Cathay, but what you might discover will be just as good, if not better"; "I know that man can fly, even if he has to be born as two brother souls to discover the secret; if I'm wrong, let my name not be Leonardo da Vinci!") and with bits of Shakespeare sometimes put deliberately into the wrong mouth. Alas, what crept into our ears, as we tried to sleep like moonlight on a bank in Belmont, was the sound, not of music, but of bubbling chicken soup with barley. John Dexter directed with an astonishing lack of dexterity, and the acting ranged from the decent but somewhat perfunctory Antonio of John Clements, through the insufferably mouthing and attitudinizing Portia of Roberta Maxwell, to the brutish and totally inept Lorenzo of Everett McGill. Zero Mostel, who was to have played Shylock, died during the Philadelphia tryouts; even dead, he might have been better than his understudy, Joseph Leon. And herein lies the third lesson of *The Merchant*—for producers.

The most successful off-Broadway play of the first half of the season would seem to be David Mamet's *A Life in the Theater*. What hides behind the Stanislavskian title is a series of vignettes, showing the Falstaff-Hal type of relationship between a grand old ham of an actor now in his decline, and an ambitious young actor who, even while deferring and learning from him, is in the process of overtaking him and taking over.

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The action moves around various parts of a theater: the dressing rooms, the wings, the empty stage, even the stage with scenes from imaginary plays in progress and with sundry dirty tricks and mishaps punctuating the proceedings. What we get, in other words, is a compendium of theatrical lore, anecdotes, and back- (or front-) biting, all reduced to a series of duologues—or, if you prefer, Aretino's *Ragionamenti* translated from a literal brothel to a figurative one. For Mamet's view of the theater is here very much a worm's-eye view—even the mock plays are conceived as parodies of genres that have fallen into desuetude, which is somewhat like poking petty fun at David Belasco or R. C. Sherriff at this late date.

Certainly, some of Mamet's dialogue adroitly balances truth and mischievous distortion. At one point, the aging actor will say: "In our scene tonight, could you perhaps do less?" At another point, the younger one, catching his colleague staring at his reflection in the glass, says encouragingly: "Keep your back straight, John, the mirror is your friend—for a few years more." But, ultimately, two problems weigh down *A Life in the Theater*. One is that these are all anecdotes, quips, rivalries that can be hung on any theatrical stick figures, which is, in fact, what John and Robert are. Under the all too typical mockery, there are no human beings. True, this is intended as caricature, but even caricatures are first of somebody specific, and then invitations to laughter at the basic grotesquerie of faces. It is all very well for a character to be, say, *the* climbing young actor, provided he is also *a* climbing young actor, with some part of him ungeneralizable.

Secondly, I get tired of Mamet's eternal duologues. However many characters there may be in a Mamet play (and there never seem to be more than four), just about every scene is a twosome. It is as if a composer wrote nothing but duos for two instruments, which, however good, would finally make us cry out for fuller orchestrations. Gerald Gutierrez has directed competently, there is suggestive but unfussy scenery from John Lee Beatty (perhaps our leading minimalist set designer), and Robert Waldman's incidental music is helpful. Aside from a stage manager who says nothing, the cast consists of Peter Evans's well conceived, patently vacuous and sycophantic yet ambition-ridden Robert; and of Ellis Rabb's John, all ham and pineapple—or, at any rate, fruit. I am not sure whether this performance could not, with a little more restraint, have gained in pathos, which would have added a welcome further dimension.

Chapter Two is being heralded as a deepening of Neil Simon's art. It is certainly every bit as much deepening as it is art. The play is admittedly based on Neil Simon's and Marsha Mason's courtship and marriage. George Schneider, a novelist, has lost his beloved wife from cancer; Jennie Malone is an actress who has lost a rather less beloved husband by divorce. Pimping for George is his younger brother, Leo, a theatrical agent; pimping for Jennie is her chum Faye, a queen of the soaps. Against all sorts of likelihood, George and Jennie meet, love, and marry, and start having difficulties, because George is afraid that happiness with the absolutely perfect Jennie means unfaithfulness to the memory of the absolutely perfect Barbara. Finally, though, things settle down blissfully,

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while Leo and Faye, both unhappily married, try their hand at some unsuccessful and ludicrous adultery. They, clearly, are intended as some sort of comic relief from the supposedly serious drama of George and Jennie, but they end up as standard Neil Simon characters making sure that the play does not get too "high" for the audience.

There's no danger of that, however. As one of the characters observes, "I have already tried transcendental meditation, health foods, and jogging, and I am now serenely, tranquilly, and more robustly as unhappy as I have ever been." I quote this for two reasons. First, because it is merely an updated version of the Horatian *naturam expelles furca, tamen usque recurret*: try to drive Neil Simon out of Neil Simon with a pitchfork, and he comes rushing right back in. But also, there is the fact that, a few days later, I can no longer remember whether it is the hero or heroine who speaks that line. The characters in Simon are interchangeable because, with minor differences, they are all Neil Simon: accumulations of wisecracks, machines that chop life down to one-liners, and humanoid contraptions, miserable for the sake of being comically miserable. This might even be all right if you did not have the feeling that the author so unabashedly adores them for being that and no more than that.

Take another example. George says to Jennie: "I want a woman who looks like you, feels like you, and thinks exactly like me." There could be real comedy-drama in this, but the problem is that Jennie, to the extent that she thinks at all, does think exactly like George. Yet neither of them really thinks. "There is a lesson to be learned from all this," says Faye, whose attempt at a gay fling has failed; "I wonder what the hell it is." That is just the trouble: Simon's characters have no ideas, and do not exist in any sort of existential or social context, except for whatever bellyaching about life can be expressed in a gag like this one about psychiatrists: "Fifty dollars an hour, and all they do is protect you from doing neurotic things in *their* offices." It may be that farce writers have usually dealt with obsessive characters in a rather sealed-off space; in that case, I can only say that Simon's obsessions strike me as less compelling, less real even, than most good farceurs'.

The acting by all four performers is at least good, and in the case of Anita Gillette (Jennie) and Cliff Gorman (Leo), better than that; Herbert Ross has staged a visually sleek production with smart timing and neat deployment in space. But even the homogenized briskness is only more of the same Simonizing process. "I don't know whether you've noticed," says the hero to the heroine by way of supreme compliment, "we also talk in the same rhythm." I don't know about her, but I have, *I have.*

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

The Cake with the Stripper Inside

NEAR THE END OF A 1913 FILM of the Denishawn school, there's a strange and unexplained sequence called Dances of the Ages. The scene is a stag banquet. Men in vaguely Edwardian costume are standing around a table with drinks in their hands. Suddenly, a group of four-inch-high dancers seems to materialize out of the tablecloth, and, to the rowdy appreciation of the banqueteers, they perform a tiny suite of dances—from the age of the cave man to ragtime. I've been unable to find out any more about this curiosity except that, according to dance historian Christena Schlundt, Ted Shawn filmed it before the establishment of Denishawn for the Thomas A. Edison film company. I wish I knew whether it was Shawn's or Edison's idea to present the dancers as a sort of animated centerpiece, or if the film was originally conceived as a regular-scale dance that got served up as a banquet entertainment later.

In any case, the film left two rather bleak sorts of images in my mind, apart from the stereotypes displayed in Shawn's crude choreography. First there is the image of dancers as playthings of a male-dominated society—an old story, that—with a tradition going back to the foyer of the Paris Opera and the pleasure domes of the Orient. I think there was a terrific moral ambiguity in both Ted Shawn and his subsequent partner, Ruth St. Denis. They must have harbored strong Puritanical misgivings about their chosen profession, and Dances of the Ages is by no means the only example in their work where dancers are shown as decorative objects, removed from the wordly affairs of men. Later on, they made virtue out of this demeaning view—the dancer became an instrument for exemplifying the spiritual aspirations of men, but he or she was still passive, doll-like, and protected by some artful metaphor from the world of deeds.

It's not surprising that Shawn could admit the movie camera into such a private dilemma. Film may well be the perfect medium to dramatize it. Even that early, to dancers films represented a kind of exploitation that went beyond the demands of predatory managers and thrill-crazed audiences. To most dancers, even now, when you photograph their performance you're taking something away from it, and dancers treat their own films like incriminating possessions that are too important to destroy but too revealing for anyone else to see. In entrusting their ephemeral product to a film maker, dancers see that product turn into a totally different entity. Film can be an unpredictable genie of the subconscious, and you risk exposing things with it that you wouldn't permit yourself on stage.

Dancers may also be drawn to film, I think, because of their highly developed visual capacities. Film can transmit the visual image directly, and it can often allow that image to change and fulfill itself more flexibly than live performance with its many practical limitations. So, when dancers make films, they often transcend their own dance. But this can be true

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in a social sense as well as a choreographic one. What comes across most strongly to me about Dances of the Ages is not a dance image but the fact that Ted Shawn could see his own work as analogous to the cake with the stripper inside.

It seems to me that one of the most important things art can do is to tell us, in accidental ways as well as deliberate ones, about its time. Film is the only way we can recover either the facts or the sociology of dance. Certainly dancers know their art is virtually the only one that cannot be pinned down and studied in depth, and they know film destroys this immunity. At last, largely because of the popularity of dance itself, more dance is being filmed for public consumption by television and commercial cinema, and there's evidence of some relaxation in the old skepticism.

Already, this liberalized view is being subverted by Disneyesque attempts to simplify dances for a mass audience. Even more disturbing is the replacement of historic dance films by new ones. The Martha Graham company has begun systematically refilming its repertory, updating older versions of dances and taking them out of circulation. The Graham attitude toward film is the same as Graham's attitude toward live repertory—she wants her work to reflect her present state of mind; she doesn't believe in repertory as an archive, and only retains old dances out of box office necessity. Graham reworks her choreography constantly, as the important changes in last spring's revival of *Primitive Mysteries* (1931) testify. Even though I saw the 1964 revival of this classic work, I would not be able to substantiate my feelings that the new version is untrue to Graham's earlier conception if I hadn't seen the 1964 work film many times. Now it is said the new version will be filmed and the 1964 film withdrawn.

This is revisionism pure and simple. It's destroying history. And it comes out of a sort of paranoia, I think, a fear that the present will not stand up if compared to the past. It comes from a deep misunderstanding of history, and of the artist's place with reference to history. Everyone but dancers—who have no history—knows that art is not a question of getting better, that the artist is not primarily working to supersede history. Whatever second thoughts an artist may have, a work of great and long-standing influence ought to belong to us somewhere in its original form. Even a minor work can contribute to our knowledge of a period, help validate a career, link together the great puzzles of creativity. What films make possible for dance is a context of greater depth and significance than the present moment can afford, or, in fact, than dance has ever had.

Quietly, here and there, people are developing techniques for using dance film in research and teaching. John Mueller, a leader in the small crusade to find and distribute good dance films, teaches dance appreciation by means of film in dance-hungry Rochester, N.Y. Many innovative projects have spun off from Mueller's classes, including a film rental archive and a remarkable quasi-reconstruction of a lost landmark of dance history, Nijinsky's *Afternoon of a Faun,* from photographs and sketches of

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the original production arranged in sequence from verbal descriptions, with the score superimposed.

One day last summer at the Dance Critics Conference in New London, Conn., Mueller looked at an expanse of bare white wall in the room where we were showing films, and decided it would be a great place to project two films simultaneously. After some experimentation, he found two versions of Graham's *Appalachian Spring*—one made in 1958 with Graham dancing, and one from the recent Dance in America telecast—that were similar enough in speed to show together without confusing the viewers too much. With the sound turned off on one film, he had to stop one projector occasionally to let the slower version catch up with the music, but as the dance went on he got so good at this that we were aware of only a slight flicker. We did stop at most of the solos to show the two versions consecutively.

That afternoon was the first time in my dance experience that I was able to do a comparative analysis of two performances without having to rely on some fallible intermediary source such as another writer's account or my own memory. What we saw that day, besides a few minor changes of steps, were two quite different interpretations of the same choreography. Probing these differences, we were able to see how Graham's style and aesthetic have evolved in the past twenty years.

One of the first things I have learned in using film for teaching is how much clearer a discussion of dance can be when the dance is before us as illustration. We all see the same thing, and in case of disagreement, we can go back for verification. When I started showing film, at a critics training program at Mills College in 1973, I fell naturally into the habit of commenting while the films were running. This is easy to do with dance, where there is no talking sound track to interfere with the words of the teacher. A good many of the record films we use are silent, so we do not even have to sacrifice our attention to music. People were a little shocked at first; it seemed sacrilegious. But later it began to seem a useful and sometimes even exciting way to learn about dance. I sense a great relief among students and other audiences where I've shown films this way; it seems people love to know, specifically, what a critic sees and how she arrives at her conclusions about style. It may even be that people want to learn more specific ways of looking at dance for themselves. I remember the great "aha" that went up from a group of music critics when I said that Martha Graham's *Frontier,* which we were looking at, is a form of rondo.

Students often tell me that their whole attitude toward a choreographer or a style of dance has changed after looking at a film. This is especially true for the dance of bygone generations. The work of the great American choreographer Doris Humphrey, for instance, whose output spanned the years 1928–58, either is not performed at all or is most likely to be done by nonprofessional dancers. No wonder her reputation has declined. Fortunately, she was not opposed to film or other forms of documentation, and it's possible for anyone to survey the whole development of her technique

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and choreography, performed by Charles Weidman, José Limón and many other great dancers who were associated with her, in the Film Archives at the Dance Collection of the Lincoln Center Performing Arts Library.

If you look at any amount of dance film, you quickly put aside your notions of a technically good movie. You learn how to find out information from footage that wouldn't make the grade as home movies. The dance films of the past often were made by amateurs, in available light, with cameras that had to be rewound every few hundred feet. They were pirated during performances and shot in improvised outdoor settings. Some of the best of them were simple work films, done in one take with a single fixed camera that took in the whole stage all the time, and often the dancers worked in bare stages and practice clothes. When almost your entire film lore consists of this kind of material, you don't think about cinematic techniques, the quality of individual performances or the details that could have been captured with only small staging adjustments for the camera. You just try to deal with what's there, and you are grateful to have it.

But, as more and more dance film is getting made, we have a chance to look at more than stolen Great Moments and sketchy work films. Last fall we saw two points of view crystallizing about how to make a dance film, or what dance on film can do, and they were represented in two major projects: the slick backstage-at-the-ballet Hollywood film, "The Turning Point"; and the two National Educational Television programs on the work of George Balanchine and the New York City Ballet.

Although the producers of "The Turning Point" assured us theirs was the first full, professional treatment of the real-life drama of the ballet, and the first time dancing had been filmed as it really is, the movie is disappointing to many dance lovers. I am waiting for the promised full-length film of the outtakes, the famous guest appearances that were cut from the final print, but I haven't much hope for it, since the dance sequences left in the film run heavily to views of the ballerina's twinkling toes, shots made directly into bright spotlights so the dancers are seen in silhouette against a glaring halo, and a variety of camera angles and positions that falsify the proportions of the stage illusion.

People are calling "The Turning Point" one of the best movies of the year, but the only way I can account for the gush over this maudlin, shallow story is that it shows dancers as grownups, conventional and emotionally unsatisfied like everybody else. The film doesn't reveal any of the real attraction of being in dance—the stupendous allure of engagement, hard work and creativity. Instead it magnifies all dance's glamourous cliches, and the characters' drab strivings for this glitz turn out to be just the same old Hollywood struggle for the same old empty Hollywood goals.

The Balanchine telecasts, part of the "Dance in America" series, represent the first time this extraordinary choreographer has submitted so much of his work to the transforming eye of the media. The shows are virtually all dance, with complete versions of *Four Temperaments* and

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Stravinsky Violin Concerto, as well as solid excerpts from three other Balanchine ballets. The project is a landmark too because it offers the public an extensive view of many of the finest dancers in America, dancers who use a distinctive but relatively unknown style of classicism. New York City Ballet dancers do not ordinarily trip around on the international star circuit, so these programs will probably serve to introduce such gifted young artists as Merrill Ashley, Bart Cook and Daniel Duell to people who wouldn't ever see them. More familiar dancers like Patricia McBride, Peter Martins and Suzanne Farrell are also prominent in the production.

Like many other choreographers, Balanchine has been skeptical about making the jump from live to recorded performance, and indeed, insensitive filmmakers have more than once betrayed his work. In agreeing to the "Dance in America" project—NYCB will also do a Live from Lincoln Center telecast of *Coppelia* at the end of January—Balanchine has obviously committed himself to an experiment. He seems to see video as a great popularizer, and he's trying to use it to broaden the company's audience. It is probably not irrelevant that NYCB has just embarked on a drive to raise three million dollars to match a National Endowment for the Arts challenge grant.

Seeing both programs together at a press screening gave me a lot to think about. Seldom on "Dance in America" or elsewhere has so much good dance been televised in something close to its original form. And seldom have I been so disturbed by the effect of television itself on dance. Dance on TV is automatically something other than dance, and I've been content with it if it gives me a record of the steps, the sequence, the movement style of the original. So much the better if it also conveys some appropriate mood, as did Antony Tudor's *Pillar of Fire* on American Ballet Theater's "A Close-up in Time," or Twyla Tharp's *Sue's Leg* on "Dance in America." What I discovered with the Balanchine was how intimate and inseparable is the relationship between his steps and the whole expanse of the stage space. I realized how often videodance tends to focus on content to the detriment of form, and how in the process it inadvertently turns art into journalism.

Producer Emile Ardolino and director Merrill Brockway chose to film the Balanchine in a large space with a wraparound scrim, and this apparently dictated the odd decision to eliminate entrances and exits. The dancers simply enter or leave the video frame, or worse, dissolve in and out on the spot like cartoons. As the logic of Balanchine's choreography begins to take hold of your imagination, you realize that you need to know exactly where each dancer comes from and how his or her dance originates and reaches a conclusion. These are not machine-cut pieces that can simply be placed in a frame, but people with a danced history as motivated and complete as the life of characters in a narrative ballet.

Television's tiny frame adds the problem of miniaturization to the problem of two-dimensionality that afflicts all filmed dance. Big ensemble ballets have seldom been successfully televised. Balanchine is especially difficult because if you show the whole stage you lose the detail of the steps, and in his work both are important. The corps is very active in its

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own right, and its patterns are not merely a trimming for the principals but an integral element in a multi-layered weave. The "Dance in America" producers chose to concentrate on the smaller units—solos, duos—and to move the camera in and out and across with them, as compensation, perhaps, for the larger choreographic flow that is beyond TV's scope. Sometimes they have created little areas within the whole space, where a dancer moves back and forth as if the rest of the dance had momentarily gone elsewhere. Sometimes the camera follows a dancer's progression, making him take space with him rather than move across a space. Brockway's wide-angle lens telescopes the downstage-upstage dimension, making the dancers look exaggerately bigger or smaller in relation to how far they're traveling. By the end of the two-and-a-half hours, I had an awful sense of disorientation, as if I'd seen a lot of dancing but lost the dance somewhere.

These are devices we see in most televised dance; when the choreography is of this magnitude, they become a major consideration. Balanchine's kind of classicism, despite its latitude in the use of the body, its wonderfully inventive phrasing and composition, still is predicated on the severe truths of the proscenium space. The dancers always measure themselves against this height, these lateral boundaries, this volume of perpendiculars. Their changing positions, groupings and pathways within this space are at the core of Balanchinism. If you distort the space, make it fluid, you lose the essential paradox of change-within-fixity that makes his dance endlessly fascinating.

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CHARLES W. MILLARD

American Style and Quality

THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING TENDENCY in recent years to identify and define the native sources for contemporary American painting. In part this seems to be a reaction against the heretofore reigning idea that Abstract Expressionism owes its existence to the infusion of European modernism brought about in this country by the arrival of artists fleeing the war in their foreign homelands. In part, also, it arises from increased scholarship in the history of American modernism, which has broadened the native background against which contemporary painting is seen, and from the fact that Abstract Expressionism is by now an historical phenomenon susceptible of more extended and dispassionate examination than when it was visible at only close temporal range. The results—particularly in such valuable exhibitions as that developed by the University of Delaware in 1975—have been, first, wider examination of the initial eruption of American modernism around the First World War, then an attempt to trace the continuity between that eruption and the more important modernist statement made by Abstract Expressionism some thirty years later, and finally, an effort to discover if there is indeed a continuous identifiable American style from the time of the Colonies to today. The latter is the quest of such exhibitions as the Museum of Modern Art's 1976 *The Natural Paradise,* which began its study with American painting of the early nineteenth century. Such searches for stylistic continuity cannot help but touch on, if only implicitly, the very nature of the consideration of works of art itself.

Works of art may be discussed in their uniqueness on either of two levels. The first of these is that of style—the use of drawing, color, brushstroke, etc. that permits ascription of a work to a particular artist, place, or time. The second is that of quality—the crucial but elusive esthetic essence opposed to all ideas of personality, locality, and temporality. One might say that works of art have *qualities,* more or less pronounced, and, to a greater or lesser extent, *quality*—a formulation which indicates with some precision the intimate relationship between the two. The quality of a work of art is embodied in its qualities and is to be known only by means of those qualities. Thus, an accurate and judicious explication of the qualities of such a work should, by implication, clearly reveal its quality or lack of it, as Creighton Gilbert has long since pointed out ("Degas and the Problem of Verifiable Excellence," *Journal of Esthetics and Art Criticism,* March 1952, pp. 217–222). The fact that the two are separated in discourse should not obscure their interdependence, which is reminiscent of that of the body and the soul. Nor should that interdependence lead one to suppose that style can determine quality, which can be neither predicted, conjured, nor legislated. Since quality is perceived only by means of style, however, if one seeks to identify an American painting style and to trace the continuity of that style from the

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nineteenth century to the present, one cannot but illuminate the quality of the works in which that style is embodied. Important to that quality, to paraphrase the *mot* ascribed to Daumier, is that the works be not only of their time but of their place. Although an infusion of European ideas may have been necessary to bring out in American painting the greatness it has attained in the last thirty years, it was equally important to that greatness that it be built on native foundations, that painting accept both its place and its regional heritage as completely as possible.

All of this is by way of introduction to a consideration of the works exhibited in *The Natural Paradise,* and of what those works reveal about the character and fortunes of the style and quality of American painting during the last century and a half. Although this country has had accomplished figure painters from Copley to Eakins and beyond, its native tradition, unlike that of France, is that of landscape. By the first years of the nineteenth century, Washington Allston had developed a landscape style, based on Claude, in which relatively dark foregrounds are played off in compositions of horizontal format against light and atmospheric backgrounds. Both tonal areas tend to be fairly large, the latter generally being seen through the former, which cling a bit to the surface of the canvas by means of trees rising the full height of the composition, etc. Allston's younger contemporary Thomas Cole accentuated this attention to surface, a kind of pictorial density, by intensifying his value contrasts and distributing them more evenly throughout his compositions, placing the resulting dramatic effects at the service of equally dramatic landscape or anecdote. At the same time in the 1830's and '40's that Cole was producing his mature work, and Allston himself was exploring more dramatic devices, another strain was taking shape in American landscape painting, one which, since Allston was trained in England and Cole had been born there, might be considered more native. It involved an amelioration of Allston's early Claudian effects, and is exemplified particularly in the work of Thomas Doughty. Doughty's *In Nature's Wonderland,* for example, suppresses value contrast by gradual transition from the foreground darks to the background lights, an effect made easily possible by a softening and graying of the tones justified by the low backlighting. The overall pictorial result is precisely the opposite of that of Cole's pictures, as the entire scene tends to dissolve in a luminous haze of grayed and continuously modulated color tones. By the 1860's this tendency, now known as Luminism, had been perfected in the work of Gifford and Kensett, whose pictures were developed around continuous, usually rather high, value structures. Although neither artist discarded the value range from very dark to very light that had characterized American painting from the beginning, nor abandoned the convention of placing the deepest dark in the foreground and the highest light in the background, both reduced the area occupied by the darkest and lightest tones, sometimes almost to pinpoints, placing the pictorial burden on a subtly inflected range of intermediate tones. Almost invariably, these pictures depict late afternoon or early evening scenes lit from the back or sides, and employ central or slightly lowered horizons with the landscape rolling gently away from the foreground to

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the extreme distance. Not infrequently the scenes represented are autumnal, using the muted colors of that season to enhance the softness of the oblique lighting.

During the 1860's and '70's several artists combined Cole's dramatic scenery and lighting with the Luminists' expansive feeling for tone in pictures that exemplify the American landscape tradition at its best. The work of these painters of the "terrific," including Heade, who favored climatic drama (thunderstorms, etc.), and Moran and Bierstadt, who preferred geographic grandeur (the Grand Canyon, etc.), is epitomized in that of Frederick Edwin Church. Large in scale and size, sharply horizontal in format, Church's paintings are dramatic in subject (*The Aurora Borealis, Niagara Falls*) but yielding in execution, and tend to exploit both value contrast and continuous tonal transition. Certain of Church's pictures (*Rainy Season in the Tropics*) dissolve in a muted haze of color. Most of them share two characteristics with other American landscape painting of the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. First, there is a noticeable absence of color used at full value, particularly of red and blue, and most compositions are built around tones of ochre, brown, gray going to blue or green, and green. Second, although large in size, the paintings are built of small touches of pigment thinly applied with the result that one is usually altogether unaware of the facture. This reticence of the paint to assert its physical presence informs the whole of traditional American painting, giving it what would be called in the argot of the mid-1970's a laid-back feeling that is perhaps its single most striking characteristic.

As so often happens both in art and in life, forces of change began to assert themselves just at the moment American landscape painting was consolidating its position. The 1870's saw the first important French and modernist influence on American painting, an influence that was, however, not to appear in full formative strength until some forty years later. This initial breath of novelty took two forms. In the work of Whistler and, somewhat later, Dewing and, to a lesser extent, Inness, it meant a tendency toward monochrome or monochrome-appearing pictures entirely worked out in a narrow value range. Retaining traditional thinness of application, these pictures introduced into the art of this country an uncharacteristic febrile note that was not to have any lasting influence. In the later work of Homer, and of such younger painters as Bellows, however, one begins to see an obviousness of facture that was the first of the more important impacts of European modernism. This obviousness resulted not so much from heavier impasto, although that was at times present, as from a broad, "fat," and fairly liquid brushwork evidencing a painterly self-consciousness that was to affect the look of American pictures for roughly seventy-five years. In both cases, the influences in question were Impressionist-derived, and were accompanied by a reduction in size and scale to what could more comfortably be considered easel pictures. Perhaps the most telling change in American painting between the late nineteenth century and the First World War, however, was its abandonment of landscape as a subject in favor of the human figure and of urban scenes. Depending in part on the waves of immigration to this

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country during those years, this change signals the desire of American painting to be recognized as an art of international quality and importance, and evidences its attempt to assimilate the French tradition.

If the surface of American art had been distorted by the powerful forces at work beneath it around the turn of the century, it was not until the First World War that that surface was rent by an upheaval so violent as to permanently alter its appearance. At that time, in large part through such agencies as the Armory Show and Alfred Stieglitz and those around him, European modernism in the form of French Fauvism and Cubism and, to a lesser extent, German Expressionism, took hold in this country. The result was in part the sort of formal distortion to be seen in the work of Burchfield and O'Keeffe, but more importantly the appearance of the saturated color one sees in the work of O'Keeffe, Hartley, Dixon, and others. Since saturated, high-keyed color is naturally anti-atmospheric, American painting of the period began to be concerned with effects of surface and it used local color to a degree theretofore unknown. That is to say, compositions tended to be determined by marking out areas within which relatively flat color could be controlled and made to relate to other such areas across the face of the canvas, rather than by letting atmospheric color expand in depth in a unitary and continuously modulated way. While value difference continued to be an organizing principle, pictures used that difference for effects of contrast rather than for those of harmony.

So long as it had been provincial, American painting had been an art of high, if limited, quality. The immediate result of the new ambition of native painters not simply to convey the American experience in the truest possible way but to explore the greatest expressive depths of which painting was possible—to rival, that is, the best painting that was being done, or had been done, anywhere in the world—was a decline in quality. This is not to say that there was not still painting as good as that done in the nineteenth century, nor that the quality of American art was permanently impaired, but that the disruption caused by painting's enlarged ambitions made the old quality couched in the old terms no longer desirable or possible, and the attainment of new qualitative scope depended on an assimilation of influences that took decades to achieve. The result was an interregnum, corresponding roughly to the years between the World Wars, during which American painting lost both its focus and the consistency of its quality, until it found a means to fulfill its new ambition by absorbing the lessons of European modernism without being untrue to itself.

The best painters to emerge from the 1920's and 30's are those who, while not denying the claims of the new art, managed to maintain some recognizably native character in their work, the result being a pictorial modesty which caused much of this work to be overlooked in the revolutionary efflorescence of the period after the Second World War. These painters include Burchfield, Hopper, Dove, and Benton, as well as Milton Avery, who matured slightly later. Burchfield preserved his vision in part by separating himself physically from New York, in part by following his bent toward nature romanticism, and in part by devoting his efforts to

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watercolor, a medium in which he could use brilliant color and still achieve open, yielding effects. In his preference for such effects, as well as in his predisposition for pure landscape, he is among the most conventionally American artists of his period. The young Hopper allowed himself to be influenced by his European study in the use of a fairly broad facture and intense color. As he progressed, however, his brushwork became increasingly restrained, to the point at which one is aware of it almost not at all, and his color increasingly mixed and subtly disposed. When color does register strongly in his later work, its strength is apt to result not from hues that are in themselves saturated but from juxtapositions that bring them out in relation to one another. Although Hopper's subjects at times suggest Surrealist influence, the literalness with which those subjects are rendered reflects something more provincial and closer to the artist's native heritage. Avery, finally, was clearly touched by Matisse both in his color and his forms. That he should have looked to Matisse rather than, say, Picasso is in itself indicative. Of all the European masters between the wars Matisse had the most to offer a painter trained in the American tradition, particularly in the scale of his works and in the almost naive directness with which he projected his sophisticated vision. Avery, however, developed his own range of mixed but brilliant color, and his affection for seascapes, and the way in which he composed those seascapes, places him squarely in the Homer-Hartley tradition.

If, as Irving Sandler has suggested in his book of that title, Abstract Expressionism represents the triumph of American painting—its emergence as an art capable of competing with the best of any time and place—it also represents the triumph of European modernism within American art, and the degree to which American artists of the 1940's and '50's were able to assimilate European ideas without violating American style may be taken as a yardstick of their success. It should be noted that the degree to which European immigrant artists were able to absorb into their native styles that of this country may be taken as a similar yardstick. In its earliest manifestations Abstract Expressionism was a relatively small-scale figure style using an obvious method of facture and not, in general, of any coloristic subtlety. It was, however, a figure style with a difference, since the "figures" of pictographic and biomorphic canvases were not usually human figures, but either animals, conventional signs, or simply unspecified organic references. For most painters this was an uneasy compromise, but Gorky made of it a thoroughgoing virtue. First exploring figure painting in the styles of Cezanne, Picasso, and others, he was finally able to synthesize a style that, while it kept a drawn armature, allowed thinly applied color to move relatively freely across the canvas. Others, among them Klee, worked or had worked in similar ways, but Gorky's compositions were more open and on a larger scale, and his biomorphic forms made of him a nature painter if not a landscapist. His style now looks more like a successful marriage of European and American traditions than the absorption of the former into the latter. It is, nonetheless, the earliest important manifestation of the qualitative dominance of American painting.

Jackson Pollock, an artist in whom the necessity to assimilate European

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modernism produced a titanic struggle not always to the benefit of his art, began with a heavily-impastoed amalgam of the styles of Ryder and Benton, absorbing into that style the modernism of Picasso. As the results opened out into paintings of large scale and daring originality, Pollock struggled with the problem of bringing line and color together meaningfully in compositions that were largely without depth. Although the size and horizontality of his canvases suggest earlier American landscape, it was only in *The Deep,* one of his last pictures, that Pollock experimented with close-valued painting and unself-conscious facture, and it may be said that in that picture he comes closest to the American painting tradition. Perhaps in part because of his early death, Pollock's efforts to reconcile European and American vision never opened out into a sustained synthetic style broadly and confidently employed. By contrast, Rothko was clearly under the influence of a monumental figure tradition early in his career *(Slow Swirl by the Edge of the Sea),* but gradually dispensed with the drawing demanded by that tradition as well as with obvious evidence of facture. Working frequently, although not invariably, with close-valued color, he moved steadily toward the large-scale, open, and atmospheric style for which he is best known, the only remaining trace of his interest in the figure being his preference for vertical formats. This is, of course, to say that he moved steadily toward effects closer to those of the American nineteenth-century landscape tradition. So too did Gottlieb. Beginning with pictographs, Gottlieb proceeded to develop his characteristic format of round forms hovering over calligraphic brushwork in compositions that were at first divided horizontally, making inescapable references to landscape. As these developed they dispensed with the horizon, growing in unity and scale and becoming ever more thinly brushed. By the 1960's Gottlieb was producing canvases of an astonishing suavity, painted in yielding, atmospheric, and close-valued color, the accenting value contrasts being relegated to the calligraphy at the bottom (*Two Discs*). If both Rothko and Gottlieb moved toward tonalism, Baziotes arrived there early, deserving, if anyone does, the name of contemporary Luminist. Although the way in which his organic shapes float across their close-valued grounds suggests aquatic rather than terrestrial referents, horizons are not unknown in his work (*Primeval Landscape*). As with his nineteenth-century artistic forbears, one finds Baziotes handling both value difference and close-valued modulation in the same work, using color atmospherically. In part because he started out at a point at which most of his fellow artists arrived only late in their careers, Baziotes' work stands apart from the painting of his time and its reputation has suffered unjustly. Its expansive strength and delicacy should now, however, be able to be seen for what they are, and for the impressive quality they embody. Finally, Clyfford Still, beginning with a regional American style and painting his way through various problems suggested by European modernism, has developed a style that explores vast areas of color, sometimes close-valued and sometimes disposed so as to exploit extreme value contrast. Built up of small paint applications thinly applied, although giving an impression of considerable impasto, these large-scale

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canvases are perhaps the closest contemporary analogues to such pictures as Moran's panoramas of the west, and are at least as successful as the work of any other artist of the Abstract Expressionist generation in raising native painting to a level capable of rivaling in quality the painting of any other time or place.

The passage and accomplishment of Abstract Expressionism have made it possible for painting since 1960 to open up toward a more relaxed style that captures once again the spirit of nineteenth-century American landscape. This has been done partly in the work of those Abstract Expressionist painters who lived long enough to consolidate their styles, and partly in the work of those who have succeeded them. If in the period between the World Wars American painting was engaged in the initial stages of an effort to bring major art out of the style it had itself developed, and to wed it to a style from abroad which it knew to be a necessary catalyst, the postwar decade saw the realization of that massive struggle. The series of disruptions brought about in American painting by the arrival of modernism caused it to break with tradition in many ways, not least in calling attention to itself by the frequent stridency of its color and vigorous obviousness of its facture. This breach having been made and repaired, it may now be possible to see more clearly the continuity, however transformed, of American style—particularly as that style has emerged in more recognizable form during the last fifteen years and we seem once again to have a painting large in scale, modest in means, and self-effacing in effect. All of which is to say that the sustained greatness of American painting is a more recent phenomenon than that of the rise of Abstract Expressionism and depends in part on a relaxed self-acceptance not possible during those years of heroic struggle.

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Reviews

DEAN FLOWER

Ishmaels All

YOU CAN'T READ MANY BOOKS about the classic American writers without being struck by how obsessively and fatefully connected they are. They all worry about landscape and what it may mean. Is it our brave new world or a hostile wilderness to be subdued, an asylum or an open road, a home or a golden opportunity for something else, New Canaan or an investment? Vaguely realizing westward, shall we ever discover our true places here, or only make a profit? Divided body and soul, where shall we build more stately mansions for the soul if not here? The more you read, say, Melville or Hawthorne or Thoreau—or indeed many of their predecessors—the more contemporary their prophecies begin to sound, the more you find their omens concern *us*. And what restless isolatoes they all were, Ishmaels all! Take for an early example the words of one Robert Cushman, an Englishman just returned from an expedition to the New World in 1622:

> We are all, in all places, strangers and pilgrims, travelers and sojourners, most properly, having no dwelling but in this earthen tabernacle; our dwelling is but a wandering, and our abiding but as a fleeing, and in a word our home is nowhere but in the heavens, in that house not made with hands, whose maker and builder is God. . . .

John Seelye quotes the passage in his revelatory new book on American Colonial literature, to which I shall turn in a moment.[1] But imagine first what the portent would be if these words could be taken as a prophecy of our present state, with God subtracted from the view. Now more than ever we're strangers and travelers in a landscape we indifferently use as if it were not our real home—moving over it faster and farther every year, selling it to developers, stripping away its resources, covering it with our buildings, polluting it, laying it waste. What are these premises to us, anyway? Have we somehow inherited Puritan notions like Cushman's that wandering and fleeing are superior to abiding and dwelling? Melville romanticized them in *Moby Dick*: "in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God," but at least Melville saw the doom in Ahab's shoreless quest. We're closer now to orphan Ishmael or to his cynical contemporary Simon Suggs, who took for a motto, "It's good to be shifty in a new country." The land is ours, perhaps, but we are less and

[1] PROPHETIC WATERS: The River in Early American Life and Literature, by *John Seelye*. Oxford University Press. $15.95.

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less the land's, and morally as shifty as ever. Thoreau was a sojourner too, but he saw where the dismal Christian soldiers were marching: "Talk of Heaven! ye disgrace the earth," he wrote in 1854. How seldom it occurs to Americans now that in disgracing our land we disgrace ourselves. Or, to return to Cushman's sermon, how vulnerable that Mosaic conception of a wandering people has proved to be, how dangerous a rejection of earthly home. It cleft the Puritan mind and opened the way for secular wanderers and explorers who could put the land to any worldy purpose they liked and feel justified in returning nothing for it. And this strain of Ishmaelite restlessness, the inability to find in nature a dwelling and abiding place, runs like a dread disease through all these American books.

Yet John Seelye can still be funny about it. He construes the true history of Colonial America as a sprawling picaresque novel, written by explorers, soldiers, cavaliers, merchants, scoundrels and just plain folks, no less than by the Puritan sermonizers whom Perry Miller first taught us to read. In all of them Seelye finds epic and farce, an imperialist fable shot through with Conradian ironies, a gigantic tale deciphered from a palimpsest of half-literary documents issuing from deep in the heart of American darkness. As history, *Prophetic Waters* ranges from the discoveries of Columbus to the diaries of William Byrd; as mythic construct, it ranges still more freely from Vergil's imperialist *Aeneid* to Melville's epic and Conrad's story, and on (by implication) into the modern world. There's no doubt that Seelye has been saturated with his sources; perhaps inebriated is the word. He crowds information into every line and phrase and word, offering the culmination of many years' research. In each colonizing thrust he discerns the dark or disruptive meaning; in fact, the dread of white space in *Moby Dick* and "Heart of Darkness" is implicit in his whole design:

> Often abominable, always fascinating [runs the introduction], it is a gargantuan story of questing knights who resemble picaresque as much as romantic heroes, for a long, lean, quixotic shadow dogs them through the American woods: knights erroneous, they are the chivalric impulse gone mad, imposing rehearsed but impossible expectations on the vast white shape of the New World.

At every outpost of American progress Seelye finds symbolic waters: Red Seas to be crossed, Jordans ever rolling between, Northwest passages to India or Earthly Paradise, channels of conquest and trade whose waters pander in whispers to Puritan and Cavalier alike.

The tale begins at the mouth of the Orinoco, with Columbus baffled and entranced by "unmistakable evidence of a continental presence where no land was supposed to be." It winds sinuously through Cartier's St. Lawrence, into the fluvial excursions around Chesapeake Bay by Captains John Smith and Miles Standish, thence to Massachusetts Bay and the more insular domains of Bradford's Plymouth and Winthrop's Boston. From the gentle Charles and Merrimack the journey proceeds into the howling wilderness of Western Massachusetts, crossing the Connecticut

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first with Thomas Hooker (to him it was a Rubicon) and then with Mary Rowlandson (to her, the waters of Babylon), before returning at last to tidewater Virginia and the westward visions of Robert Beverly and, finally, William Byrd, whose exploratory river becomes that famous dividing line, "a neoclassical vista of perspective lines drawn to a vanishing point in the west," as Seelye puts it. No less comprehensive than imaginative, *Prophetic Waters* thrives on the discovery that history is fiction, fiction history, and that is all ye know on earth and all ye need to know.

The book displays a novelist's keen appreciation of the self-deceiving pose and ambivalent gesture, and Seelye skewers many a pious Christian this way. He shows that Captain John Smith, for example, was surely our first true soldier imperialist, in wiliness and cunning no less than in Falstaffian swagger the father of us all. Author of that notoriously suspect document about his Indian "affairs," the *True-Relation,* Smith emerges not as the passively noble object of Pocohontas' love but as an aggressively ignoble source of Powhatan's evil: "For Powhatan did nothing to Captain Smith," writes Seelye, "that was not a reversal of what Smith intended for him, the Indian King, like his River, merely reflecting back the Captain's own countenance." Smith is Ahab, reduced to a cynical *miles gloriosus,* pursuing "a darkness cast before him on the water, that obscurest of self images, his shadow." Seelye's imagination responds just as interestingly to such figures as Mary Rowlandson, whose captivity narrative has in recent years been (one would have thought) exhaustively discussed for such a modest document. Typically, Seelye finds high comedy in it, when the sore afflicted Puritan dame endures the last humiliation at the hands of devilish Metacomet, King Philip: he offers her a smoke! As she writes, "It seems to be the bait the Devil lays to make men lose their precious time . . ." Alas, no Calvinist had heard of a peace-pipe or could imagine hospitality.

Seelye's gift, then, is for discovering our real history in unsuspected places: in the mysterious grave found by Bradford and his company containing the remains of a white man and an Indian child (an "indigenous symbol" the Puritans couldn't decipher, "a male madonna with child," suggests Seelye); in the blundering, scoundrelly opportunism of Thomas Morton of Merrymount, whose impudence made him victim of the blindest Puritan bigotry; or in the Indian captivity of Eunice Williams of Deerfield, who refused to return to God and Massachusetts when given the chance ("a mythic alternative," as Seelye reads it, to the Puritan's fable of redemption). Everywhere *Prophetic Waters* suggests in pattern and symbol the omens of our complex American fate, not only anticipations of Hawthorne and Melville but shadowings of more recent fables written at Wounded Knee, in Viet Nam, and on the moon. Seelye has what Henry James so admired in the comprehensive Balzac, a truly grasping imagination.

While Seelye borrows cheerfully from every important critic of early American literature—and goes them all one better, William C. Spengemann tends to go it alone.[2] The difference in breadth and appeal is

[2] THE ADVENTUROUS MUSE: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900, by *William C. Spengemann.* Yale University Press. $15.00.

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enormous. Spengemann's description of an "adventurous muse" suggests that our fiction grew out of travel narratives extant since Marco Polo, waiting only for the discoveries of Columbus to transform them into fables of self-discovery. Here again the point of attack is located at the mouth of the Orinoco, or rather in the mouth of its dumfounded discoverer. But Spengemann is prolix and professorial where Seelye was abruptly metaphoric, so Columbus comes out thoroughly masticated by analysis: "At moments," we are told, "he betrays a certain nascent yearning to escape his ideological commitments and confront the facts of his experience in all their stunning variety. But he is so appalled by the spiritual implications of *terra incognita,* of a world beyond medieval belief, that he cannot imagine who he himself might become in such a world." And so on.

With few references to any Puritan conceptions of self and with outright denial of Christian journeying (because the destination was assured in God), Spengemann's argument depends on systematic discussion of historical geography and its transformations, on close reading of innumerable travel documents, and on a fundamental distinction between writers who value travel and change versus those who prefer fixity and home. The former becomes our great tradition, a "poetics" of adventure extending from Columbus through Dana and Melville and on into the works of Mark Twain and Henry James. The alternative tradition, a "poetics" of domesticity, Spengemann attributes darkly to "certain highly influential English novelists" who wanted to "restrain and discredit" the Adventurous Muse and its "potentially subversive vision." It's a convenient and interesting scheme, that shows significant relations between works so diverse as Bradford's *History,* Tyler's *Algerine Captive,* Poe's *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym,* and James's *Ambassadors.* But it's only a scheme. Domesticity simplifies to "a literary anachronism," a failure to "deal adequately with the fact of change." Meanwhile, the Adventurous Muse has lured all our greatest novelists down "the open road of creative imagination, in search of . . . an absolute justification for their own extravagant wanderings." Stirred by the wild surmises of Columbus and his more literary descendants, Spengemann ends by celebrating the spirit of undying novelistic adventure wherever he finds it. He ought at least to have considered those other errant adventurers, zealots, opportunists, and imperialists who were guided by the same devious Muse. Unlike John Seelye's book, this one will not revise syllabi across the land.

Edgar Dryden's fresh perspective on Hawthorne, by contrast, should do much to rescue him from the negative brilliance of Frederick Crews.[3] It was Crews's *The Sins of the Fathers* that twelve years ago so convincingly analyzed all Hawthorne protagonists into patterns of "neurotic terror." Without denying Crews's psychoanalytical truth, Dryden restores our sense of Hawthorne as an extraordinarily subtle and controlled craftsman. Using concepts drawn from certain modern critics like Sartre, Dérrida and Poulet, Dryden suggests that Hawthorne's traditional issues—substance and shadow, isolation and community, narcissism and love, romance and the real world—yield something far more modern than Freu-

[3] NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE: The Poetics of Enchantment, by *Edgar A. Dryden.* Cornell University Press. $10.00.

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dian paradigms. Blessed with an elegant precision of mind, Dryden offers a new "synthesis" of Hawthorne's whole *oeuvre,* beginning with that familiar paradox, "the enchantment of distance." Tact is the essence of Dryden's method: "No writer . . . is more sensitive than Hawthorne to the ways the probing scrutiny of others in shaming us robs us of our autonomy and spontaneity." Or this description, of "something always . . . left in reserve, undiscovered and unspoken, making it possible for [Hawthorne] to speak to a potentially hostile audience about matters of which silence is the safest form of expression, and for the reader to respond to his words without fear of becoming his mystified victim."

Reinterpreting Hawthorne's prefaces as essays on the impossibility of innocent enchantment, Dryden shows how the author eludes a prying reader's "capture" while still inviting him to "decipher and interpret" that elusive identity. But naive enchantment, suspension of disbelief and innocence are long gone, for Hawthorne as Dryden reads him; in place of trusting author-reader mutuality there must be veil and reserve, or at best a kind of tension between the revealed and concealed "insuring that neither reader nor writer can ever be completely caught by the other." This problem leads to a discussion of Hawthorne in his later years as a pathologically "homeless man," half-exile and half-ghost, bemoaning his "vagrant life" yet unable to settle into one place or identity, condemning himself and his family to restless vagabondage as "pilgrims and dusty wayfarers." What's disturbing about this homelessness, Dryden suggests, is the way it arises out of Hawthorne's discovery that nothing in history assures we ever had an ancesteral home. "I cannot overcome," says the author's stand-in in *Septimius Felton,* "this natural horror of being a creature floating in the air, attached to nothing; ever this feeling that there is no reality in the life and fortunes, good and bad, of a being so unconnected." In short, Hawthorne became victim of the same trap his earlier wandering Wakefields and Goodman Browns and Ethan Brands fell into: he naively stepped aside from the dream of "real life," discovered the superior energy of his own imagination, saw the annihilating emptiness of what he'd left and found any sense of home irrecoverable. Dryden shows in totally new ways what we've known before, that Hawthorne is an astonishingly modern writer.

No such vagabondage plagued Henry David Thoreau, who knew exactly how far from home he was at Walden Pond. He bragged of being a sojourner, at home in whatever landscape he surveyed. But as Richard Lebeaux's biographical study shows, Thoreau was painfully ambivalent about home and suffered acute anxieties of identity.[4] Concentrating on the period between graduation from Harvard in 1836 and the decision to live at Walden Pond in 1845, Lebeaux fashions an Eriksonian analysis of Thoreau's youth, identity and crisis. It appears that Thoreau's truth was much like Gandhi's: the early death of his older brother John, a fatherly mentor and beloved companion, served to fix his guilty feelings of rivalry into a pattern of inaction. Unable to confess and resolve his ambivalence

[4] YOUNG MAN THOREAU, by *Richard Lebeaux.* University of Massachusetts Press. $12.50.

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toward John, Lebeaux argues, Thoreau chose to dissociate himself from all sinful motives like love and ambition and make his way in the world by passive resistance. That Thoreau was predisposed to such dissociation appeared earlier, of course. Lebeaux dramatizes that in the era of Thoreau's young manhood all the important "fathers" of the nation had died, leaving power in the hands of unheroic businessmen who had in mind nothing more visionary than commercialism and expansionist warmongering. Following Emerson, Thoreau declared a "moratorium" (Eriksonian *schema* again) on choosing a career and identity, lingered about Concord somewhat defiantly, enjoying a "prolonged adolescence," Apollo tending the sheep of King Admetus. But in reality Thoreau was too ambitious to stay home and too fearful to explore the open road.

Lebeaux's painstaking analysis reveals that Thoreau could not have been so well acquainted with himself as he claimed. Throughout the early journals and letters Lebeaux points to the most agonized uncertainties. Once when his imperious mother told him abruptly to take a knapsack and hit the road, tears sprang into Henry's eyes, and his sister had to reassure him quickly, "No Henry, you shall not go; you shall stay at home and live with us." But Lebeaux argues that all this came to an end when Thoreau found himself at Walden in 1845 and gave that identity triumphant expression in the 1854 masterpiece. The argument fails to explain why *Walden* required nine years of delaying and re-writing, nor does it account for the years of embittered uncertainty afterwards. In fact, Lebeaux's scrupulous questioning of Thoreau's method in the *Journals*—a method of self-questioning veiled as didactic assertion— opens the way for a similar re-reading of *Walden*. Given this perspective, how many of his famous, confident assertions become double-edged! Consider what self-criticism could be behind the words "I never knew, and never shall know a worse man than myself." Or, when he scorned the idea of travel: "What does Africa—what does the West stand for? Is not our own interior white on the chart? black though it may prove, like the coast when discovered." There's a miniature "Heart of Darkness" latent in that. Perhaps then, Thoreau made his prolonged adolescence permanent, and, like an Ishmael who never put off from the lee shore, found his security in a lifelong moratorium.

In our century Thoreau has become, however, a model of husbandry and rootedness, a man who knew himself by knowing beans, who kept free of all tainted possessiveness. Faulkner created his counterpart in Ike McCaslin, who surrendered gun, compass, and watch, and learned in hunting not to hunt. It seems to have been chiefly Southern writers who have kept alive that sense of an ideal relation between man and landscape; the Agrarians, in fact, took their stands on it in 1930. Floyd Watkins' recent discussion of the theme, unfortunately, shows how easily it can harden into dogma.[5] Watkins considers an odd assortment of novels by Steinbeck, Margaret Mitchell, William Styron, Willa Cather, William Faulkner, N. Scott Momaday, and Sinclair Lewis, asking of each whether

[5] IN TIME AND PLACE: Some Origins of American Fiction, by *Floyd C. Watkins*. University of Georgia Press. $10.50.

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the story grew out of intimate understanding of a community and a place. Not surprisingly, we learn that *As I Lay Dying* gets highest marks for sympathetic understanding of the folk, that *The Grapes of Wrath* is fraudulent in portraying Oakies, that *Gone With the Wind* lies about history, and that *Main Street* is contemptuous of decent home-town folks. Drenched in its own authenticity, *House Made of Dawn* becomes for Watkins "the fullest and best representation in art of Indian culture that has yet been presented to the white man in all American history," although how Watkins can be sure of that isn't explained, nor why he thinks it must make a good novel. Watkins similarly endorses *The Confessions of Nat Turner* for its seeming authenticity ("deeply human and true whether or not it is fact") and *Death Comes for the Archbishop* for its mastery of an alien culture ("written . . . with an accuracy like that of one born to the people").

There's something touching about a modern critic who travels to Sauk Center, Minnesota, in the 1970's, interviews some elderly folks, and reads yellowed pages of old newspapers, all to "prove" that Sinclair Lewis lied about them in his novel of 1920. Watkins longs for a literature that will suggest alternatives to "standardized America" and "cultural nomadism" and urban melting-pots, so he'll surrender any critical principle when he finds a real novelist with Yoknapatawpha mud on his boots. In both introduction and conclusion Watkins laments the disappearance of community from American life: "Nature, community, family, the drama (or fiction) of interrelationships have been lost, then, in the world from which Americans have fled in vast movements of population." Methinks the funeral oration is a bit premature. If all is voided and gone as he says, it's a puzzle to know where all our contemporary fiction is coming from. Ironically, one of Watkin's emblems of traditional stay-at-home security in the nineteenth century is Hawthorne, who he thinks remained "almost entirely within his own cultural area." The diminishments lamented by Watkins are real enough, but they've been with us far longer than he thinks. Nowhere is his sentimental nostalgia exposed more clearly than when he concludes, "It is frustrating not to be able to step from the role of critic to the role of monarch and proclaim orders that worlds and communities may be created so that men may live in them happily and that writers may have happy people to write about. . . ." Yes, too bad we can't bring back dear old Dixie and those cotton fields of home.

Where Watkins can only lament the passing of an impossibly golden dream, another Southern inheritor of the agrarian ideal, Wendell Berry, examines the past more skeptically and has useful ideas about what's to be done.[6] Like Thoreau he'd revise the economy along spartan lines; like the Melville of *Moby Dick,* he rejects the murderous competitive mentality of capitalism, like Ralph Nader; he attacks the blind self-interest of big business and big government. But his book resists classification; it's American homemade, as Hugh Kenner might say, a majority-of-one report, a quirky blend of attack upon "agribusiness" and meditation on American history, with all manner of literary parallels and explications

[6] THE UNSETTLING OF AMERICA: Culture and Agriculture, by *Wendell Berry*. Sierra Club Books. $9.95.

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generously thrown in. A poet and teacher at the University of Kentucky, Berry lives and works nearby on a small farm. His premise is that the motives of conquering white men in the New World have always been and continue to be exploitative, not nurturing. "The first and greatest American revolution," Berry declares, "was the coming of people who did *not* look upon the land as a homeland." Read in the context of books about our restless imperialism and endless sojourning, such assertions come as a refreshing sanity. Settle down, says Berry. Work the land, give something back to it, depend more on yourself and it, less on the suppliers, middlemen, specialists, and all their heavy machinery. Easier said than done, no doubt, but Berry offers something more than most critics who bemoan the sickness of our society; he shows how most of our essential ills can be traced to an increasing dissociation from the earth, from the soil on which we all literally depend.

Berry is no pilgrim at Tinker Creek; he's out to harangue and convert when he can. But his book transcends that spirit. When he attacks the *National Geographic* article in praise of agribusiness, and the Iowa students' farm-of-the-future project, and the speeches of "Mr. Butz" and his cohorts, their language is what enrages him. With a vigor like George Orwell's in "Politics and the English Language" Berry proves their moral dearth by their empty words. The book is full of testing and questioning. Just when you think Berry might have become a little obsessed with lovely dirt, he shows its necessary connections with the whole domestic order by veering off into a discussion of *The Odyssey*. Wonderfully, what he finds there solidifies his whole argument against our unsettled contemporary conditon: Odysseus' homecoming affirms Penelope's mortal love (over Calypso's immortal promise) and the responsibilities of home (over the adventuring life). From what other dirt farmer could you expect that? Just when you think Berry may have succumbed to a back-to-nature formula, he'll declare his admiration for the Jeffersonian ideal or the Amish community, or he'll even roast the Sierra Club, publishers of his book. Just when you think his model has become too Jeffersonian, he turns to the Peruvian tribe who have farmed more shrewdly than Americans for centuries. Drawn from such grand and homely materials and welded together by a moral intensity, *The Unsettling of America* has a strong, settling effect. It's angry, in the DeVoto tradition, but when read in the context of so many reminders of American fate, it's a welcome antidote. Although all our traditions seem to say otherwise, the adventurous muse is *not* superior to the domestic. Ishmael should go home and plant beans.

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MAUREEN HOWARD

Fiction Chronicle

LORD BYRON, NIJINSKY, GARBO—our stars drawn from reality—seem to have strained the mere facts of their lives to enter into modern mythology. The great mystery invested in Byron's death at Missolonghi, Nijinsky's madness or Garbo's haunted darting into New York department stores could never be thought up like the capers of punk rock personalities plotted in the nervous glamour of a boardroom at International Creative Management. The vast audience for legendary figures exists but the legends themselves cannot be forced. I suspect that the name of Patti Smith will not appear in trivia quizzes ten years hence, nor will the manufactured talent of The Dictators be honored as Joyce honors, sadly, ironically, the faded reputation of an English tenor in "The Dead." In place of our latter-day stars and long lost heroes we are presented with a parade of discardable celebrities: Gary Gilmore, Farrah Fawcett-Majors, Billy Carter—their likes will come again. Whether we are callous or merely harmless spectators I cannot say without indulging in vague cultural generalizations, but we seem to yearn for our contemporary myths in any degraded form. In much of the recent fiction I've read I do perceive a constant need on the part of the writer not so much for heroes *manqué* as for the legendary mode. Too often the writer relies upon some literary "idea" of myth (John Gregory Dunne, Philip Roth) to prop up an under-imagined fiction, or to rescue him from what must seem the dull hard work of an ending. At best (in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*) heroic tales still evolve in response to deep cultural needs and are joined with a genuine artistic impulse to elevate realistic fiction.

John Gregory Dunne, who with his wife Joan Didion has become a West Coast literary celebrity, invents his razzmatazz readable novel *True Confessions* with all the sincerity of a sleazy press agent.[1] His references are Raymond Chandler for tough-talk style, sex and violence and for psychological padding the old parable of two brothers. Tom Spellacy, the bad brother, is an Irish detective hustling through the underworld of an unconvincing L. A., hard-boiled and base to an acceptable degree, but not thoroughly rotten. His brother, the Right Reverend Desmond Spellacy is the good guy and don't you know that the saintly Monsignor has feet of clay while the cop comes through with some long lost principles. Both men are sullied by the world and both men are brought down finally by the same crime. There is a lurid murder of a young prostitute, a madam with a heart of gold, an idealistic Chicano priest, a cynical Cardinal. *True Confessions* won't make a bad movie. There must be a young actor ready for the Pat O'Brien role and the sex scenes can now be done just short of the X-rated porn that Dunne gives us on the page.

What won't make the movie houses is the scurrilous smart-mouthed talk

[1] TRUE CONFESSIONS, by *John Gregory Dunne*. Dutton. $9.95.

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of *True Confessions* in which the author takes such obvious delight. Outside of Lenny Bruce records this novel must take the prize for the use of ethnic slurs—hebe, harp, jigg-a-boo, spade, shine, dinge, wop are licensed under the cover of detective story lingo. What Dunne wants us to buy is his boyish fascination with the great myth of the Saturday matinee gangster movie and to get a kick out of his irreverence and his references to favorite radio stars and popular songs of the Forties without the slightest artistic effort. Since no one escapes Dunne's naughty-nasty epithets in *True Confessions* only the most unsophisticated hebe or spade can take offense, but as a mick I really loathe the way in which the Irish are knocked around. Irish Catholic society is transplanted unsuccessfully from Dunne's hometown of Hartford, Connecticut to Los Angeles (where it never existed) simply to serve his Hollywood story. For a subtle, hilarious, unrelenting account of the Catholic world in America I recommend Gary Wills' *Bare Ruined Choirs*, but I outgrew the cruel mockery of nuns and priests displayed in *True Confessions* when I was still in convent school. The novel's repetitive patter on sex in the Catholic family and diocesan politics is sodden barroom humor. Furthermore, I am the daughter of a foul-mouthed Irish detective whose territory in Connecticut was not far from John Gregory Dunne's Hartford and believe me that court house banter was lively, inventive. The swaggering Tom Spellacy is a phony, a two-dimensional twirp researched out of late movies. The moral pretensions of *True Confessions* are contemptible and the thin parable of the good and bad brother does not make it a classy novel. The Spellacys are set up so that Dunne may turn childishly upon his past. At least there is a twinge of conscience on the author's part for he prefaces the novel with this bizarre disclaimer:

> This is a work of fiction. The author is aware of the anachronisms and ambiguities in the social and cultural setting of this book as he is aware of distortions of time and geography.

Where there's guilt there's life, I guess, and perhaps the next time John Gregory Dunne turns to the idea of writing a novel he will realize that in honestly imagined fiction the audience will accept a three dollar bill.

In *The Professor of Desire* Philip Roth arrogantly creates a myth of his own past work.[2] There is absolutely nothing in this novel that supports the sexual angst of Roth's hero. In no way does little David Kepesh's borscht belt childhood, described with predictable charm, justify the anguished mind of David Kepesh, Ph.D. We are asked to believe once again in that terrible dilemma of a nice fellow who cannot sustain desire for the woman he loves, but we are asked, moreover, to refer to the history of the patient we knew in *Portnoy's Complaint, My Life as a Man,* and *The Breast*. Indeed, David Kepesh is the name of the academic who in Roth's Kafkaesque prelude to this novel wakes to find himself a large boobus Americanus. In this new work we find a repeat of the scintillating three-way sex scene that appears in *Portnoy* as well as that kooky, willful and destructive wife that

[2] THE PROFESSOR OF DESIRE, by *Philip Roth*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $8.95.

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Roth has created so often with obvious satisfaction. The presumption must be that his readers are fans, following this serial of the neurotic Jewish boy. Like followers of Trollope or Galsworthy we should feel cozy by now with the cast of familiar characters. All that's missing is Alistair Cooke to make the connections that Roth fails to give us—"You will remember from our last episode the brainy, much loved son, the fawning oppressive parents, the guilt of adolescent sex. . . ."

In *The Professor of Desire* all Roth's undeniable energy seems to go into set pieces. There is the opening shtick about "Herbie Bratasky, social director, bandleader, crooner, comic, and m.c." of the resort hotel in the Catskills owned by Kepesh's parents which is funny in the way it trivializes the past, but ordinary, too, warm-up material for a night club act. The effect of an over-produced one man show, an attempted "comeback" is all that Philip Roth accomplishes in *The Professor of Desire*. Yes, he can "do" the anxious parents, the unrestrained animal passion of his hero, the idyllic love affair. His talent is a given, but many of these numbers are weak and he can not transcend his material.

Take, for instance, this well-turned rather pompous sentence:

> The mythology of the Swedish girl and her sexual freedom is, during these years, in its first effulgence, and despite the natural skepticism aroused in me by the stories of insatiable appetite and odd proclivities that I hear around the college, I happily play hooky from my ancient Norse studies in order to find out for myself just how much truth there may be in all this titillating schoolboy speculation.

The professorial tone could be more truly comic than the one liners Roth favors, but it is not sustained. Does Roth intend his faulted hero to hide behind such rhetoric, to distance himself from emotion through the elegant rhythms of his sentences? Or is this eloquence Roth's own arch attitude toward launching the sexual mythology? The problem is central to his work because he is afraid to imagine Kepesh apart from himself. Professor David Kepesh cannot make a Nabokovian fool of himself, nor cut off his literary mannerism long enough to let the Kafkaesque nightmare evolve without classroom commentary. Roth seems in *The Professor of Desire* to protect his hero more than ever and the result is sentimental, self-regarding. The final love affair with a saintly, beautiful, bright girl, in the very hills where little David grew up, takes on the aspects of an empty idyll—the neurotic's dream of maturity. This love is in fact quite unbelievable to Professor Kepesh and he turns from the woman, naturally, to the self-enchantment of his own mellifluous voice:

> *It's time for bed, that's all.* Oh, innocent beloved, you fail to understand and I can't tell you. I can't say it, not tonight, but within a year my passion will be dead. Already it is dying and I am afraid that there is nothing I can do to save it. And nothing that you can do. Intimately bound—bound to you as to no one else:— and I will not be able to raise a hand to so much as touch you . . . unless first I remind myself that I

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> must. Toward the flesh upon which I have been grafted and nurtured back toward something like mastery over my life, I will be without desire. Oh, It's stupid! Idiotic! Unfair! To be robbed like this of you! And of this life I love and have hardly gotten to know! And robbed by whom? It always comes down to myself!

There is no urgency in this pretty lyric passage. Roth's need to state the case again remains entirely private.

The strongest sections of *The Professor of Desire* are those which give us Kepesh directly as a teacher. Roth's intelligence is impressive and playful and it must be a great relief for him to deal with this new material (commentary on Kafka and Chekov) rather than sustain the old fable that hardly interests him. The parody of Kafka's "Report to an Academy" in which Kepesh addresses his students in Literature 341: Desire, is brilliant, moving, full of dazzling turns. The richness of diction, the rounded periods, the pacing that lead to the professor's plea to speak in class of his erotic desire are meaningful stylistic flourishes.

The greatest mistake in Roth's novel is the awful intrusion of Mr. Barbatnik as an ungraceful closing note. Barbatnik is a survivor of the holocaust brought by David's sweet old father to visit in the country. After dinner by candlelight Barbatnick tells the story of his life—"the utter ruination of a world, and about the blows that keep on coming." Kepesh (Roth) makes the unforgiveable equation (as Arthur Miller does in *After the Fall*) that the courage to survive his own mucked up sexual history is as effecting, as tragic as . . . but I will not complete this morally indefensible proposition. Publicly Roth is a man of conscience and he knows that the most horrifying fact of our time cannot be turned into a mythical allusion to lend dignity to the limited emotional scope of his story. What's missing in all the professorially amusing bits and pieces is the desire to write a real novel.

By contrast *Going Blind* by Jonathan Penner is a spare first novel that strives quite unsuccessfully to construct the story of yet another young English professor along the lines of fable.[3] Penner is a careful writer with nothing like Roth's ease and talent. The hard work shows in the explicit building of a scene and the precision with which he selects his minor characters. The book has an honest drive and a hero whose anguish is affecting. Paul Held is going blind, but before the automobile accident that injures his right eye he is witness to the last agonizing days of his best friend and colleague who is dying of cancer. He has fallen finally and painfully in love with his friend's wife and at the very moment when Paul might be released into full, productive life a reckless turn of the wheel leaves him helpless in a hospital bed. One man's death does not make the other's life possible. Paul has to survive his own personal tragedy to deserve love and the rewards of his career. What he begins to see is that his great friendship was based on competition, that he is a prisoner of his ambition (pathetically, it is only tenure at stake) and that there is something unreal in the exalted quality of his love for the bereaved Ruth.

[3] GOING BLIND, by *Jonathan Penner*. Simon and Schuster. $7.95.

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The power of *Going Blind* is somewhat undermined by a style that is at times too simple, but when Penner uses his metaphor of blindness directly he can be morally exact: this novel is not a mere horror story, for Paul Held's loss of vision is coupled with a growing spiritual blindness. He becomes wonderfully clever at manipulating the world around him in order to conceal his infirmity. Every step is schemed, every response planned in what becomes a grotesque restriction of action and emotion, while everyone around Held knows that his left eye has sympathetically joined his right and he now lives in total darkness. The novel ends rather too neatly with Held's rejection of self-pity and an assumption of an independence and dignity as he goes off, white cane in hand, to Iceland, there to pursue his scholarly studies, a work which he feels has enormous vision. *Going Blind* is not a spectacular novel but at a time when there is so much glitter in fiction, Jonathan Penner comes across as accomplished and sincere.

It's a ninety degree turn back to the mindless vitality of J. P. Donleavy's *The Destinies of Darcy Dancer, Gentleman*,[4] which I mention only because it is such an ephemeral display of verbiage—four hundred and two pages of bluster written out of some bogus literary idea of the nineteenth-century comic novel. As an imitation of Thackeray's *Barry Lyndon* it is weak and cynical, full of cads, rogues, naughty nannies, bounders and touts. Donleavy, a professional Irishman, has created a myth of himself as gentleman writer, walking stick, beard, tweeds—out of another century. For those who collect obscure literary curiosities I recommend Donleavy's introduction to the Penguin *Barry Lyndon*: it is unintentional parody. Dickens might like to have created this inflated writer, J. P. Donleavy, counting his pennies, bewailing the sadness of the artistic lot while gibbering about his success and his secretary. He goes to the dentist, parades the London streets, flirts at a cocktail party, etc. while poor Thackeray provides the occasion for his high and mighty prose:

> For cads are getting in awfully short supply. And such a pity.
> These men, these rogues, they serve too. Who politely in the interests of their own necessity took stunning risks with your property, jewels and wives included, and who, if you can catch them before they abscond, will, over ample drink, console you. The world is somehow squalid without them. For the best you can ever get on this earth is a dream. And a rogue, needing only a few admiring victims, is the greatest of dreamers. Blessed as they are with such mighty imagination. And for your money you can at least sail spellbound past a few painful hours. Because there is more than life in a man in whom devils and angels dwell with the harmony of rain and rainbows.

Donleavy is the sort of calculating writer so distant from his real past that he forces one to think of the literary game he plays. The fee for writing the introduction to *Barry Lyndon*, reissued in conjunction with the Kubrick

[4] THE DESTINIES OF DARCY DANCER, GENTLEMAN, by *J. P. Donleavy*. Delacorte. $9.95.

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movie, must have been hefty (he's another celebrity) and then, too, being forced to read the book gave him the roguish notion to re-do it as *The Destinies of Darcy Dancer, Gentleman.* Not all cads are blessed with imagination.

The posthumous tales of Isak Dinesen have been published in a volume entitled *Carnival.*[5] The best of Dinesen's tales have always held a fine balance of a storytelling method derived from literary models—sagas, fairy tales—and her own piercing sense of psychological reality. In "Anna," to my mind the finest piece in this collection, there is a remarkable interlocking set of stories like an intricate puzzle toy that is pleasurable to the touch and equally pleasing to decode. These stories seem to lead away from a short prelude about a famous ballet master who is disillusioned with the state of his art:

> "The ballet of our day," he said, first to himself and then to his friends, "has sold its soul to the devil! May God forgive me, I have myself been middleman to the transaction. It is no longer a rose garden, a live growth, such a thing as God takes pleasure in creating—it has become as barren as a display of fireworks. Our fine feats of skill and dexterity are like a series of notes, the melody of which has been lost."

By the simple device of sending the ballet master on a trip to Italy, Dinesen sets her story in the town of Bergamo and, of course, it is just the perfect love story for romantic ballet which unfolds in patterns much like dance sequences. It is a tale of innocence in an over-civilized world.

The aging mother of a noble family fallen into poverty is consoled by her priest who reveals yet another story to her—the story of Anna who is to come and be her serving girl. There is a bitter Cinderella story in Anna's past and there is to be one in her future. Anna's mother, a deaf mute, was raised in a convent and supported by an idle English woman whose mad pursuit in life was to find a blue color which she imagines to exist but can not procure. She intends to find that blue in a china jar. The detail of her quest is perfect fairy story material and absolutely natural to Dinesen.

This restless search for purely personal aesthetic reasons is chilling, yet correct in characterizing Lady Helena whom we will not hear of again until more money comes through at the end of the story. Yes, the son of the noble household falls in love with Anna and though he may need an infusion of her peasant blood and Lady Helena's money the family pride will not allow a marriage. Anna wandering off by herself is discovered by the ballet master as she performs with a troupe of children in a café garden. The weak son asserts himself and leaves home temporarily. In what I imagine the ballet master would see as a perfect ending, the boy, unable to leave Bergamo and his family, is praying for his lost love while Anna goes off to Paris, fame and fortune, there to be loved by the world. A moving pas de trois. When the sentiment works in Dinesen's fables as it does in "Anna" she achieves the simplicity of line that we admire in good

[5] CARNIVAL: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales, by *Isak Dinesen.* University of Chicago Press. $10.00.

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story ballet. It is her rhythms, her pairings, her quick character studies that support the romance and never let it go soft at the center.

In the title story, "Carnival," Dinesen's imagination is overwrought. It is a story of modern decadence. Here the costumed society people that were a part of her life—some young, some old, some famous—meander through a lot of clever talk about crime and love, diddle dangerously with a pistol and discover that one guest at their party is a false negro. Another guest is dressed as Kierkegaard and so forth—the worst of Fellini without the visual exaggerations, empty as the commentary that accompanies *Vogue*'s snapshots of just such events. Some shorter pieces, "The Fat Man," "Uncle Theodore," add distinction to the Dinesen oeuvre.

The Ice Age by Margaret Drabble has an authority about it that is new to her work.[6] In *Realms of Gold* she began to assume that the large designs of the English novel were there for the taking but allowed herself to get caught up in imitations of Murdochian games. In *The Ice Age* she handles an intricate plot with confidence and creates a cast of characters meant to reflect a range of attitudes toward modern day Britain. The slow shift of history has made victims of all the characters in this novel. Anthony Keating, the leading man, is living by himself in Yorkshire, bereft of his London life and waiting for Alison Murray, the woman he loves, to come back to him. Though he has made the choice to live in a remote village, he is uncomfortable with nature. His retreat from the world is self-conscious. He has failed at business deals he never quite understood and he has had a heart attack.

Of Anthony Keating's destruction Drabble says: "He had the satisfaction of knowing that it was all his own fault. He had brought it on himself." But Alison Murray, whose life is a list of misfortunes, cannot admit the idea of choice. She must believe in bad luck, nothing else can explain her rotten marriage, her sister's breast cancer, one daughter in prison in Eastern Europe and the other mentally retarded. This good woman cannot believe in "a world where the will was potent, not impotent: where it made, indeed, bad choices and killed others by them, killed them, deformed them, destroyed them." Drabble's lovers are set in a difficult path of revelation that will, by the end of the novel, reverse their positions. Alison assumes the responsibility of having made choices in her life and is freed from the irrational guilt for her child's defects and her sister's death, while Anthony entertains the idea of chance in a prison camp in that same Eastern European country from which he saved Alison's surly daughter. In the beginning of the novel Anthony is biding time before the authorities catch up with him for a shady real-estate deal. He escapes the just punishment and is imprisoned for a crime he never committed. Drabble's novel is built on such ironies though her steady narrative never forces them.

The Ice Age is an extraordinarily open work with elegiac passages that create a public background for the enactment of private lives in passages like this summing-up which soars rhythmically yet is perfectly contained:

[6] THE ICE AGE, by *Margaret Drabble*. Knopf. $8.95.

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> A huge icy fist, with large cold fingers, was squeezing and chilling the people of Britain, that great and puissant nation, slowing down their blood, locking them into immobility, fixing them in a solid stasis, like fish in a frozen river: there they all were in their small houses, with their first mortgages and second mortgages, in their rented flats and council flats and basement bed-sits and their caravans: stuck, congealed, among possessions, in attitudes, in achievements they had hoped next month to shed, and with which they were now condemned to live. The flow had ceased to flow; the ball had stopped rolling; the game of musical chairs was over. *Rien ne va plus,* the croupier had shouted.

This control of history and acceptance of the facts is one pole of the novel. The other is a cinematic odd-angled view of the trashy modern improvements in a heartless urban landscape of cement, steel, lurid hotel interiors and cheap goods that reveal the anxiety of everyday life. Alison, traveling home, finds herself in an unfamiliar train station with no services, walking through a concrete tunnel which leads illogically to a dangerous traffic island. There, an injured dog with its side ripped to the raw flesh finds its way with dumb persistence through the cars. It is a terrifying vision that remains with us throughout Drabble's description of the passive depression that overcomes Alison Murray when she is safely home. Though she can endure her personal tragedy, the world is too much for her, too disturbing as it can often be for any one of us.

The careful patterns of accident opposed to intention in *The Ice Age* come directly from a novelistic tradition that demands solutions. Margaret Drabble is accomplished at finishing off the design: the little secretary who fell in with the ruthless real-estate man becomes a distinguished business woman associated with an architect who still maintains views of a humane cityscape; Alison's sullen, drop-out daughter is chastened by the example of the decent adults around her and studies to be a nurse. The characters who can never be transformed by events are the defective child and a hopelessly optimistic woman "determined as she is to ignore the implications of reality." It is only with Anthony Keating that Drabble goes wrong. Imprisoned, this ordinary man discards his personal life and enters into a spiritual state that justifies his suffering. He reads Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and like that medieval philosopher finds comfort "more in philosophy than faith." In a novel that refers to the over-arching myth of apocalypse so movingly, Anthony Keating's conversion to heroic stature by way of a superior inner life seems contrived, theoretical—like the mysticism Doris Lessing resorts to at the end of *The Four Gated City*. The finale of *The Ice Age* relies too heavily on what Margaret Drabble calls a *necessary* imagined future for Anthony Keating.

Song of Solomon by Toni Morrison is a fine novel exuberantly constructed and stylistically full of the author's own delight in words.[7] Morrison has a strong narrative voice and much of her novel's charm comes from an oral tradition, the love of simply telling, for example, how places and people

[7] SONG OF SOLOMON, by *Toni Morrison*. Knopf. $8.95.

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got their names and how these names—Not Doctor Street, Ryna's Gulch, a boy called Milkman, Mr. Solomon, women known as Pilate, Sing and Sweet—contain history. There is an enchantment in Morrison's naming, a heightening of reality and language. Though each name is almost mythical it can be explained factually, thus the grandmother named Sing was really part Indian, Singing Bird, but not quite, the illegitimate daughter of a white gentleman, she was Byrd. In *Song of Solomon* lives are as strange as folk tales and no less magical when they are at last construed.

Toni Morrison has written a chronicle of a black family living in a small industrial city on the shores of Lake Michigan, but the method of the book is to enlarge upon the very idea of family history, to scrape away at lore until truth is revealed. And so we see that all the fears and misunderstandings that have shaped, say, the hostile marriage of Macon Dead and his wife Ruth, are as open to interpretation as the influence of dialect and The Good Book upon an old ballad. Milkman Dead, their son, finds that he is burdened by the truth about his parents and elated by a trip to Virginia to discover the remote romantic tales of his family's past. Morrison's novel demythologizes the Dead family, but even as Milkman learns the truth—there was no gold hidden in a southern cave, no lurid scene in which his mother threw herself naked upon her father's corpse—the new myths are created. There was, in fact, Milkman's great-grandfather, Solomon, a prodigious Biblical lover who enters into legend. "O Solomon don't leave me," the black children sing in their play, a corrupt version of Solomon's story, but of course their game, their song has the vitality of life over legend and so does Morrison's novel.

Song of Solomon is so rich in its use of common speech, so sophisticated in its use of literary traditions and language from the Bible to Faulkner, that I must add it is also extremely funny. Toni Morrison has a wonderful eye for the pretensions of genteel blacks and the sort of crude overstatements made by small time revolutionaries. Like many fine artists she dares to be corny—there is a funeral scene worthy of Dickens in which a crazed old woman sings "Who's been botherin' my baby girl" over her daughter, a poor deluded creature who has died of a broken heart. And like many great novels at the core it is a rather simple story of a boy growing to maturity. On the day Milkman Dead is born a mad insurance agent, Icarus-like, is trying to fly off Mercy Hospital. Milkman is finally weaned from the romance of the past and his own self-concern, a grown man ready for life, ready to fly. As for myth, Toni Morrison knows it's dead material unless you give it life—that's art.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

I Don't Care What Mama Don't Allow

KLEIST GOES TOO FAR (does he always know he goes too far?), for instance in "The Marquise of O—" when Mama rejoices to witness through a keyhole the not quite uninhibited reconciliation of father and daughter:

> . . . as she was able to see through the keyhole, her daughter was sitting on the Commandant's lap, something he had never in his life allowed her to do. Finally she opened the door and peered in—and her heart leaped for joy: her daughter lay motionless in her father's arms, her head thrown back and her eyes closed, while he sat in the armchair, with tear-choked, glistening eyes, and pressed long, warm and avid kisses on her mouth: just as if he were her lover! Her daughter did not speak, her husband did not speak; he hung over her as if she were his first love and held her mouth and kissed it. The mother's delight was indescribable; standing unobserved behind the chair, she hesitated to disturb the joy of reconciliation that had come to her home. At last she moved nearer and, peering around one side of the chair, she saw her husband again take his daughter's face between his hands and with unspeakable delight bend down and press his lips against her mouth. On catching sight of her, the Commandant looked away with a frown and was about to say something; but calling out, "Oh, what a face!" she kissed him in her turn so that his frown went away, and with a joke dispelled the intense emotion filling the hushed room. She invited them both to supper, and they followed her to the table like a pair of newlyweds; the Commandant, to be sure, seemed quite cheerful during the meal, but he ate and spoke little, from time to time a sob escaped him, and he stared down at his plate and played with his daughter's hand.[1]

There's no place like home, be it ever so humid. Here in the to go no further very bosom of the family (archetypal *ménage à trois*), Denys Dyer coughs nervously and notices something: "There is a strong hint of an unconscious incest motif."[2] Besides: "He fires a revolver at his daughter—

[1] From Martin Greenberg's translation of the stories: Heinrich von Kleist, *"The Marquise of O—" and Other Stories* (Criterion Books, 1960).

[2] THE STORIES OF KLEIST, by *Denys Dyer*. Holmes and Meier. $17.50. In a footnote Dyer also notices that the scene was "strongly influenced by the erotic scene between father and daughter in Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Letter 63." He doesn't quote from Letter 63 or otherwise try to support his assertion, though it's just as well he doesn't, because the similarities are only schematic, and Rousseau's scene is all deliberate masturbatory hallucination told from the point of view of the daughter: the father, angered by the daughter's choice of suitor, strikes her; later, remorseful and ashamed, with a "sort of involuntary gesture" he seats her on his lap (the mother present and approving), whereupon "in this embarrassing attitude" she kisses him and "felt his arms pressing my breast with a rather poorly smothered sigh" (the dangling prepositional sigh in this literal, accurate translation is

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a sexual act, one might say . . ."; at least Dyer might say so, doing his best here to make sense out of a writer who isn't content to settle for brilliance, power, and mastery.

What Dyer deals with when he's being helpful is Kleist's mastery of complex, lucid, and endlessly explicable short fiction. He pays tribute to Kleist's thunderclap opening sentences; carefully summarizes the intricate and economical plots; describes Kleist's reliance on lengthy and astonishingly vivid passages of indirect discourse; describes his commitment to paradox and chance, contrast and contradiction, misunderstanding and error; discusses the large and serious philosophical issues raised by the stories; solemnly demonstrates the expressiveness of the punctuation: "This book on Kleist's stories is intended to help those who study his works at universities and to interest readers with little knowledge of German literature in stories that are commonly regarded as masterpieces of prose fiction." But Dyer is helpless to deal with the outreaches and outrages, the moments like that family free-for-all in "The Marquise of O—" from which he rashly gleans a strong hint of unconscious hoo-hah (of which there may well be a strong hint in Dyer himself as he invents his own version of another such moment in the same story: "Kleist tells how, immediately after the rape, the count helped put out a fire . . . running around with a dripping fire hose in his hand"; but Kleist's text reads as follows: "The Russian officer . . . was scrambling among the burning gables, hose in hand, aiming the stream of water at the flames." Why does Kleist's stream dwindle into Dyer's drip? Maybe Dyer "unconsciously" rejected Kleist's image because he found it too energetic to be decent "immediately after the rape"; and he would probably refuse to believe that the outrageous symbolism works because this isn't Kleist trying to impress the reader, it's the inexhaustible count—great balls of fire!—obliged by still another wartime emergency to reconsider and reënact his nature). At any rate, Kleist is the inexhaustible extremist who, by scattering them everywhere, insists on the importance of such moments.

It remains a temptation to see them as mere highlights of Kleist's elegantly machined plots, which can have the look of bearing the full weight and meaning—and gloom or joy—that the stories have to offer:

> Of all the stories Kleist wrote *Der Findling* [*The Foundling*] may reasonably be held to be the most sombre and depressing. . . . Out of the goodness of his heart a worthy middle-class tradesman, happily married with wife and child, adopts a foundling child whom he finds by the side of the road. By the end of the story the man's son is dead, his wife is dead, the foundling has been murdered by him, he is strung up in a deserted Piazza del Popolo for this crime, and he goes eagerly to hell, hoping there to find his victim and carry out further revenge on him. All

---

the father's). "I told him [she tells her no doubt fascinated confidante], and I mean it, that I would be happy to be beaten every day for the same reward, and that there isn't any treatment however harsh which a single one of his caresses wouldn't efface to the bottom of my heart." Kleist read and admired Rousseau, but "The Marquise of O—" inhabits a different planet.

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> the good [sic] human virtues are questioned and perverted, and human institutions, such as law and religion, seem to aid and abet the satanic foundling. It is a bleak and chilling view of life that Kleist presents in this story, which is compressed into some sixteen pages of print.

Dyer has the plot right, drear as can be, and he notices its extraordinary compactness, but what he manages to ignore is the sunburst of personal energy that irradiates it at the very end:

> In short . . . wickedness triumphed and the government, upon the priest's intervention, issued a decree confirming Nicolo in his possession [of Piachi's house] and commanding Piachi to cease from troubling him about it.
>
> Just the day before, Piachi had buried the unfortunate Elvira, who had died from the effects of a high fever brought on by the episode. Maddened by this double grief, he put the decree in his pocket, went to the house, and, with the strength that rage lent him, threw Nicolo, who was the naturally weaker one, to the floor and dashed his brains out against the wall. The deed was done before the people in the house knew he was there; when they found him, he was holding Nicolo between his knees and stuffing the decree down his throat. After which he got up and surrendered all his arms; he was put in jail, tried, and condemned to be hanged by the neck until dead.

Piachi goes on to stuff the decree down the throat of the government also, because though "in the Papal States there is a law forbidding a criminal to be executed without his first receiving absolution," Piachi "obstinately refused absolution":

> . . . he was led out to the gallows. On one side stood a priest who, with the voice of the last trumpet, depicted all the terrors of that hell whither his soul was about to depart; on the other side another, with the Body of Christ, the holy means of atonement, in his hand, extolled to him the abode of eternal peace.
>
> "Do you wish to share in the blessings of redemption?" both demanded. "Do you wish to receive the Holy Communion?"
>
> "No," Piachi answered.
>
> "Why not?"
>
> "I don't want to be saved. I want to go down to the lowest pit of hell. I want to find Nicolo again, who won't be in heaven, and take up my revenge again, which I could only partly satisfy here!"

So for three successive days they go through the same rigmarole on the gallows and can't get him to coöperate in a proper hanging:

> When, on the third day, he again had to come down the ladder without having been hanged, he raised his hands up in a fierce gesture and cursed the inhuman law that kept him from going to hell. He sum-

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> moned all the host of devils to come and fetch him, swore his only wish was to be executed and damned, and promised he would take the first priest that came along by the throat just so he could lay his hands on Nicolo again in hell!
>
> When this was reported to the Pope, he gave orders for him to be executed without absolution; unaccompanied by any priest, he was hanged, very quietly, in the Piazza del Popolo.

"The tragedy is absolute and unresolved," says Dyer, but he's taken in by his own summary; the story isn't tragic, nothing here has the effect of irresolution or waste or loss: indeed Piachi fulfills himself, overcomes all his enemies, dies triumphant—"unrepentant" would give a false impression—and glowing with anticipation; rather, this extravagance of energy is comic or farcical or even transcendent, comparable to the effect of *Oedipus at Colonus,* whose hero is also a furious old man who embraces his death in a sublimity of self-approbation.

Kleist is less concerned with the momentousness of issues or events than with the momentum of feeling. The gallant officer, having materialized in the nick of time to save the Marquise of O— from a marauding gang of his own soldiers, is so carried away by the excitement of the rescue and the defenseless beauty of the unconscious Marquise that he rapes her and precipitates the comedy of a rapist turned suitor who is unknown as the former and unsuitable as the latter to his bewildered lady and victim:

> In M—, a large town in northern Italy, the widowed Marquise of O—, a lady of unblemished reputation and the mother of several well-bred children, published the following notice in the newspapers: that, without her knowing how, she was in the family way; that she would like the father of the child she was going to bear to report himself; and that her mind was made up, out of consideration for her people, to marry him.

Kleist's characteristically abrupt and informative opening sentence introduces with appropriate sly sympathy the innocent (and well-bred) spring of all the wild oscillations of the story. Everybody else—her parents as well as her gallant rapist—is driven or thwarted by desire for the beautiful and beleaguered Marquise, who in the course of the story while just standing around waiting for a streetcar is first raped and afterward courted by her lover, thrown out of her father's house and later reclaimed by him with uncontrollable sobs and "warm and avid kisses on her mouth," scornfully rejected by her mother and later worshiped as "saintly" and "purer than the angels":

> "From now on . . . I will wait upon you hand and foot, my darling child. You shall have your confinement in my house; if the circumstances were different and I were expecting you to present me with a young prince, I shouldn't take care of you with greater tenderness and consideration. I'll not budge from your side again the rest of my days. I defy the whole world; from now on your shame is the only glory I wish,

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> if only you will think well of me again and forget the cruel way in which I repudiated you." The Marquise tried to comfort her with endless caresses and reassurances, but the evening came, and then midnight, before she succeeded. The following day, when the old lady's excitement, which gave her a fever during the night, had somewhat abated, mother, daughter, and grandchildren drove back to M—. The journey was like a triumph. . . .

In the vicinity of the fated and unavoidable young widow, feelings are likely to get out of hand. Aphrodite begins as an innocent bystander. (Aphrodite, not Galatea, because Kleist skips all the preliminary stages of creation. Goethe, who ought to have seen himself in his own work as Pygmalion trying to pray some life into a gallery of plaster busts, found Kleist's work unbalanced and morbid, perhaps because—in the fiction at any rate—even so "passive" a figure as the Marquise is instantly breathing and dangerous, a provocation and a source, a fuse if not a bomb.)

The title character of "Michael Kohlhaas" begins as an innocent bystander too, but the world—in the persons of brutal lackeys, mean-spirited knights, and graceless princes—makes the mistake of passing him off as a nobody to whom the inadvertent and impersonal injustices of the world will be as sourly acceptable as they are to the rest of us. For the first twenty-five pages of this tremendous story Kleist slowly and patiently puts together the scores of circumstances that one by one deprive the respectable and God-fearing horse-dealer of all his reasons for trusting in God and going through channels; and then—

> With this handful of men, at nightfall of the third day, he attacked the castle, riding down the tollkeeper and gateman as they stood in conversation in the gateway, and while Herse [Kohlhaas's groom, the earliest victim of the train of injustices], amid the sudden bursting into flames of all the barracks in the castle yard, raced up the winding stairs of the castle keep and with thrusts and blows fell upon the castellan and the steward, who were sitting half undressed over a game, Kohlhaas dashed into the castle in search of the Junker Wenzel. In such fashion does the angel of judgment descend from heaven. The Junker, who was in the middle of reading aloud the decree sent him by the horse-dealer, amid uproarious laughter, to a crowd of young friends staying with him, had no sooner heard the latter's voice in the castle yard than he turned pale as a corpse, cried out, "Brothers, save yourselves!" and vanished. Kohlhaas, entering the hall, grabbed hold of a Junker Hans von Tronka as the latter came at him and flung him into a corner of the room with such force that his brains splattered over the stone floor, and asked, as the other knights, who had drawn their swords, were being routed and overpowered by his men: where was the Junker Wenzel von Tronka? But, seeing that the stunned men knew nothing, he kicked open the doors of the two rooms leading into the castle wings, searched up and down the rambling structure and, finding no one, went down, cursing, into the castle yard to post guards at the exits. In the meantime, dense

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> clouds of smoke were billowing skywards from the castle and its wings, which had caught fire from the barracks, and, while Sternbald and three other men were busy heaping up everything that was not nailed down tight and heaving it out among the horses for plunder, the corpses of the castellan and the steward, with those of their wives and children, came hurtling out of the open windows of the castle keep accompanied by Herse's exultant shouts. . . .

Within days and weeks "the dragon" has spread confusion and terror throughout the land: issues the " 'Kohlhaas Manifesto,' in which he called upon the country to give no aid or comfort to the Junker Wenzel von Tronka, against whom he was waging righteous war, . . . on pain of death and the certain destruction by fire of everything they called their own"; keeps recruiting followers for his guerrilla band; routs a sheriff's force and sets fire to the outskirts of Wittenberg; routs an armed troop under the Prince of Meissen; advances to Leipzig and sets fire to the city; issues a new manifesto according to which he is "a viceroy of the Archangel Michael, come to punish with fire and sword, for the wickedness into which the whole world was sunk, all those who should take the side of the Junker in this quarrel," and which concludes, "Done at the Seat of Our Provisional World Government, the Chief Castle at Lützen"; routs a cavalry troop from Leipzig; panics "all Saxony," so that the Elector, whose weakness and indifference in Kohlhaas's case have precipitated the catastrophe, "announced he was assembling a force of two thousand men . . . to capture Kohlhaas"; eventually draws the attention of Martin Luther himself, who in a public notice denounces Kohlhaas and demands his submission to the laws of God and man. Much is yet to come: an interview between the two intractable rebels; a time of negotiation during which the dragon seems tamed or in chains; a mysterious gypsy woman and a locket; a triumphant execution (like Piachi's), during which Kohlhaas opens the locket that holds the secret of the Elector of Saxony's line, reads the paper through, then "looking steadily" at the Elector standing below him sticks the paper into his mouth and swallows it, and submits his neck to the axe while the Elector lies before him in a fit unconscious on the ground. It's a very long story, a comedy of self-interest and circumstance that couldn't have been expected to open out more or less accidentally toward such possibilities; but Kohlhaas is a man in touch with the quick of his uncharted nature, and, as the Elector discovers, there are dragons out there.

Kleist (by the evidence of a friend's letter) saw himself as a dramatist and regretted the time he had to spend on his stories, which he considered pot-boilers and occasional pieces; and it's a fact that the critics and outline-histories classify him as a dramatist who also wrote some impressive and idiosyncratic fiction. But in this respect Kleist resembles Chekhov: each is less an instrument through which powerful stories tell themselves than an authoritative voice which tells them; each, in his plays, having lost his voice delegates authority to the protagonist—in Chekhov, the yearning middle-class woman of the Russian boondocks (Emma

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Bovary minus gonads); in Kleist, the headlong and undependable sensibility which resembles his own without being answerable to that authoritative voice which nerved him to put up with his sensibility for thirty-four years before he had to put an end to it.

Prince Frederick of Homburg is said to be Kleist's masterpiece, but prodigies of interpretive gymnastics don't dissipate the aura of neurotic self-dramatization: Kleist, despised and rejected by his monocled family of Prussian generals past and future, writes a fairytale about a young commander susceptible to daydreaming, inattention, fainting-fits, disobedience, and fear of death who redeems himself by accepting—actually, *over*-accepting—the ideal of self-sacrifice for one's country; and after a mechanical reprise of the opening scene (the hero as dreamer) the play concludes quite unironically with the following lines:

OFFICERS: To horse! Away!
TRUCHSS: Into battle!
DÖRFLING: To victory! To victory!
ALL: Death to all the enemies of Brandenburg!

—which aren't notably more literary than "Heil Hitler!" or "Kill the gooks!" or "Death to the German invader!" Kleist's "tragedy," *Penthesilea,* seems to be about the awful violence of passionate love (it does come up with one interesting character, Achilles, presented as a shrewd and amiable ladies' man), has Greek pretensions, and concludes with a peripeteia in which —offstage of course—the heroine not only kills her lover Achilles, she bites chunks out of him too; but when Kleist's voice isn't there reporting matter-of-factly on the palpable brains that Piachi or Kohlhaas splatters over nearby floors and walls, the characters speaking for themselves have such an attack of stage fright they can't do better than make like the woe-is-me or oy-vay school of drama:

MEROE: She is terrible!
PENTHESILEA: I kissed him dead?
FIRST PRIESTESS: O Heavens!
PENTHESILEA: Surely I kissed Him? Or did I tear him? Speak!
HIGH PRIESTESS: Woe! Woe upon thee! Hide thyself!
Eternal darkness cover thee from sight!
PENTHESILEA: So—it was a mistake. Kissing—biting—
Where is the difference? When we truly love
It's easy to do one when we mean the other.
MEROE: Help her, ye gods!

Kleist's only play in which the medium doesn't hopelessly cramp his style is *Amphitryon,* a rather grim adaptation of Molière's witty and uncommitted comedy of appearances. In Kleist Alkmene becomes the protagonist, and the relation between Alkmene and Jupiter is a more abstract and much talkier (*less* dramatic!) version of the relation between the Marquise of O—and her Russian officer: woman "purer than the angels" besieged

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by circumstances and the male principle that won't take no for an answer—

JUPITER: What would you do if he were to appear now?
ALKMENE: If he would now appear to me—you're torturing me.
How can Amphitryon appear now
When I have dear Amphitryon here—in my arms?
JUPITER: And yet, it easily could be the god in your embrace,
Because you thought he was Amphitryon.
Why should your feeling then surprise you?
Suppose that I, the god, held you in my embrace
And thereupon Amphitryon, your husband, showed himself.
What would your heart say then, do you suppose?
ALKMENE: If you, the god, held me in your embrace,
And thereupon Amphitryon, my husband, showed himself,
Then I should be most sad indeed, and wish
That he would be the god and you
Would stay Amphitryon for me, just as you are.

It isn't (though Thomas Mann says so) "the wittiest, most charming, most intellectual, profoundest, and loveliest theater piece in the world"; nor Molière with a Prussian accent; it's an interesting personal adjustment of one of the theater's great plots to a characteristic theme of Kleist's. Maybe adaptation was more congenial to Kleist than invention when he was writing drama: anyhow, in this instance he had the luck to be working with characters none of whom—divine or human—had the kind of sensibility he couldn't as a playwright resist identifying with and losing himself in. But none of them sounds at all like Kleist either, and we miss him.

Writing fiction Kleist has no problems, he can be himself without being at the mercy of himself: it may have helped that writing fiction seemed to him a waste of his time which he ought to have spent writing those heroic dramas suffused with Shakespearean pathos which represented his notion of masterpieces. He couldn't have imagined that every one of his eight stories—from the shivery vignette "The Beggarwoman of Locarno" to the epic novella "Michael Kohlhaas"—is a masterpiece and unlike anything written by anybody else before or after. Who but Kleist could have written a story that emerges from the opening sentence of "The Earthquake in Chile" and doesn't turn into a Beerbohm parody?

> In Santiago, the capital of the kingdom of Chile, at the very moment of the great earthquake of 1647 in which many thousands of lives were lost, a young Spaniard by the name of Jeronimo Rugera, who had been locked up on a criminal charge, was standing against a prison pillar, about to hang himself.

Anything is possible, and it all happens at once. (Kafka, who esteemed Kleist—he would read aloud from "Michael Kohlhaas" to friends—and

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was influenced by him, redid him inside out: Nothing is possible, and it never happens together.) In Kleist's fiction, which is heroic as his plays never are, the personal is always besieged by social proscriptions or social or natural or even supernatural catastrophes and always a match for them. Life can be, it had better be, beautiful. "The Duel" is an inexorable and catastrophic story about the death of chivalry, in consequence of which the irreproachable knight and his virtuous lady live happily ever after. Kleist specialized in happy endings: during the last hours before he blew out his brains (splattering them over the shore of the Wannsee), he said goodbye to his friends and family in the liveliest and most joyous letters he ever wrote; and Piachi and Kohlhaas on the scaffold are shamelessly jubilant as they wait for the trap to be sprung or the axe to fall.

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DENIS DONOGHUE

Lowell at the End

I CANNOT BE THE ONLY READER whom Robert Lowell's last few books disappointed; the books, I mean, since *Near the Ocean* (1967). Disappointed; I don't mean bored. Books as revealing as *History,* say, could hardly fail to "interest" or even to provoke concern. These books raised again the old question about the use of one's experience, what a poet makes of his life when he wants to make poetry of it. David Kalstone has been pondering this theme in his recent *Five Temperaments;* the five are Elizabeth Bishop, James Merrill, Adrienne Rich, John Ashbery, and Lowell. So the question is in season. But I want to think of it in terms somewhat different from Kalstone's for the moment: why is the relation between personal experience and the produced poem, in Lowell's case, somehow less fruitful in *Day by Day* than in, say, *Life Studies?*

The question is raised specifically in the "Epilogue" to *Day by Day,* though the answer which Lowell enforces seems to me disingenuous:

> Those blessed structures, plot and rhyme—
> why are they no help to me now
> I want to make
> something imagined, not recalled?
> I hear the noise of my own voice:
> *The painter's vision is not a lens,*
> *it trembles to caress the light.*
> But sometimes everything I write
> with the threadbare art of my eye
> seems a snapshot,
> lurid, rapid, garish, grouped,
> heightened from life,
> yet paralyzed by fact.
> All's misalliance.
> Yet why not say what happened?
> Pray for the grace of accuracy
> Vermeer gave to the sun's illumination
> stealing like the tide across a map
> to his girl solid with yearning.
> We are poor passing facts,
> warned by that to give
> each figure in the photograph
> his living name.

Disingenuous, however touching: the question ("something imagined, not recalled") is too important to be dissolved in the rhetoric of "fact" and appeal to Vermeer. "Yet why not say what happened" is not the point: the gap between "what happened" and the "saying" is precisely the point. Call it the question of Memory and Imagination. Recall, too, the

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quarrel between Wordsworth and Blake on that ground; how Wordsworth thought memory and imagination compatible forms of energy, but Blake thought memory a nuisance, alien to the original and originating power of imagination.

The question is not only genuine; it is inevitable. An honest poet who has turned his entire life, with whatever degree of definition and success, into an *oeuvre* is bound to resent the aesthetic habit which has enabled him to do such a thing. Or at least to resent it on occasion. He is bound to feel, from time to time, that he has merely taken dictation from the circumstances of his life, that he is, in Yeats's term, a naturalist, helpless before the contents of his mind. A secretary, or a dictaphone, at best a telephone. There is evidence that Lowell often felt his poetry a mere function of his life. This feeling would not matter, if his spirit were truly Wordsworthian: it would then be easy for him to persuade himself that memory is a form of imagination, that it is not a machine for transcribing facts. I suppose Lowell had a touch of Wordsworth in him, and that he found some of his poems imaginatively convincing even when they were apparently nothing but transcribed facts. But I think he was of Blake's party, at bottom: or, the same thing in other words, he became sceptical of fact and event, perhaps bored by the poverty of his recollections at the end.

I have to offer some evidence for these assertions. One: Lowell regularly writes of poetry and of the poetic spirit in terms of the neo-Platonic tradition in which the originating experience is inspiration. "I would write only in response to the gods," he protests in *Day by Day*, "like Mallarmé who had the good fortune/to find a style that made writing impossible." Again:

> Can poetry get away with murder,
> its terror a seizure of the imagination
> foreign to our stubborn common health?
> It's the authentic will to spoil,
> the voice,
> haunted not lost,
> that lives by breaking in
> berserk with inspiration.

That's clear enough, surely. Only one tradition authenticates the diction of terror, seizure, illness, divine frenzy. In that tradition, even one's mistakes hit the right mark; as Lowell says in "Unwanted":

> I was surer, wasn't I, once . . .
> and had flashes when I first found
> a humor for myself in images,
> farfetched misalliance
> that made evasion a revelation?

Once; in *Life Studies*, certainly. A further piece of evidence that Lowell was of Blake's party, in principle:

> Coleridge,
> the author of *Dejection*,

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thought
genius is the discovery
of subjects remote
from my life.

Not exactly: what Coleridge said, commenting in Chapter 15 of *Biographia Literaria* on Shakespeare's "Venus and Adonis," was that a proof of Shakespeare's genius in that poem was his use of a subject remote from his own "private interests and circumstances." A point common to Keats, Coleridge, and Hazlitt is that Shakespeare's imagination is dramatic rather than egotistical, he gives things a life of their own, he does not merely lend them his own life or force them to receive it. But note, too, Lowell's irony in describing Coleridge as the author of the "Dejection" Ode, a poem as close to Coleridge's own personal interests and circumstances as anything in Lowell. Coleridge thought Shakespeare's way the highest and greatest, but in his own poetry he had to do the best he could with the poor device of turning his moods into verse. If that way's good enough for Coleridge, why should Lowell feel abashed? And so forth.

What am I saying, then? Just this: that according to the aesthetic principle which he avowed, Lowell was a Romantic, a visionary, a Blakeman; the problem he set himself was that of transfiguring his experience, making it not merely his own but Everyman's. Not by generalizing: "to generalize is to be an idiot." Lowell's method, in *Life Studies* and *For the Union Dead,* was to trust his sense of the continuity between his own nature and that of others. His sickness was merely a particular instance of a general sickness. There is a passage in René Char's *Hypnos Waking* which describes the imagination:

> L'imagination consiste à expulser de la réalité plusieurs personnes incomplètes pour, mettant à contribution les puissances magiques et subversives du désir, obtenir leur retour sous la forme d'une présence entièrement satisfaisante. C'est alors l'inextinguible réel incréé.

Lowell's fully achieved poems exemplify this process: think of "Memories of West Street and Lepke," "Skunk Hour," "Eye and Tooth," "Myopia: A Night," "Night Sweat," and the two "No Hearing" poems from *For Lizzie and Harriet.* In these, the "presence" is not a transcription or, in the spirit of the "Epilogue" to *Day by Day,* a "fact": in Char's terms, we feel that many experiences, persons, events were indeed expelled for their incompleteness, and were redeemed for the poems by the poet's desire: the particular conjunction of absence and desire makes them, in the poems, the "entirely satisfying presences" they are. Clearly, in this formulation, desire is a crucial stage in the action of the imagination: I am not sure how otherwise it may be characterized. It is not, to use another of Yeats's phrases, the will trying to do the work of the imagination; it is the imagination itself in the phase of its need, desiring to transform absence into presence. If someone says that memory is the same desire, I deny it, because the transformation is not active in its character: the "plusieurs personnes" are "incomplètes," hence their expulsion, and if memory is

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content to recall them in their incompleteness, the imagination is not. Presence is completeness; the figures in Lowell's achieved poems make a presence for themselves, they constitute presence for the poet and for his reader, the poem is their presentation, their immediacy to the language. In the fully achieved poems, Lowell's imagination acts by a process similar to that described by Char; or rather, it earns the right to turn absences into presences. That is why the personages in those poems give the impression of having been expelled, kept out of the place, and that they came back, came into the poems because Lowell's desire could not be appeased without them. The summer millionaire in "Skunk Hour" is not recalled by memory: even if he were a "fact," it would still be true to say that he was not recalled by memory. Nor was he dragged in for some portentous symbolic reason. The poetic truth is that, kept out of the poem, he pressed upon it and demanded to be admitted. I speak of an impression, but with an implication of the language sustaining it, the transforming style at work.

There is very little transformation in *Day by Day*. The themes are the old congenital ones, brought up to date: loss, end, suicide, the way we were in Baton Rouge, Peter Taylor, "Red" Warren, the good days, dreams, Jean Stafford, Auden, Elizabeth Hardwick, rural England, "my unhealthy generation," Caroline, Sheridan Lowell, turtles, ants, a dolphin. Nothing wrong with these, as themes. But Lowell can do little or nothing with them; or nothing beyond what he has already done. And he writes with the low spirits of a poet who knows that he cannot transform them any more. In one poem he complains that his words no longer "sound": and it is true, the reverberation of *Life Studies,* the "hum and buzz of implication," is suppressed. The book has an air of weariness, as if the personal troubles behind the poems never got to the point of transpiring in the lines and made, therefore, only a dead weight upon them:

> We only live between
> before we are and what we were.
>
> In the lost negative
> you exist,
> a smile, a cypher,
> an old-fashioned face
> in an old-fashioned hat.
>
> Three ages in a flash:
> the same child in the same picture,
> he, I, you,
> chockablock, one stamp
> like mother's wedding silver—
>
> gnome, fish, brute cherubic force.
>
> We could see clearly
> and all the same things
> before the glass was hurt.

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Past fifty, we learn with surprise and a sense
of suicidal absolution
that what we intended and failed
could never have happened—
and must be done better.

This poem, "For Sheridan," is full of good intentions, but they are allowed to drift away in a tired, elegiac manner. The perceptions are not remarkable, except for their lassitude, their air of not having enough energy left to bring them to fulfillment or even to test their value. The enervated, off-hand style is trading on a stronger past. Nothing in the poem is earned: the details which call attention to themselves are exorbitant, usurious. "Before the glass was hurt": "hurt" is offensive, blatantly in excess of anything worked for or earned in the poem. And the elegant weariness of "Past fifty, we learn with surprise . . ." makes a claim upon the reader's sympathy which the perception itself, banal as it is, does nothing to justify.

Is there an easy, dreadful explanation for this? That Lowell never had anything to write about but himself, and that in the last few years he had used himself up, there was nothing more or new to say, nothing but the same daily round? But what about those plays, and the translations, imitations, versions, and what about *History*? Were they not about other things? In *The Dolphin* Elizabeth Hardwick is quoted as saying to Lowell, "Why don't you lose yourself/and write a play about the fall of Japan?" I take this as meaning: "why don't you forget about yourself for a while, suppress yourself, and write something 'objective,' remote from your private interests and circumstances?" Or, in Char's terms, why don't you expel yourself, in all your incompleteness, from the scene, and expel all the other people whom you are in the habit of dragging into your poems as functions of yourself; and wait, trust in the Lord, until you will all be ready, combining in genuine presence? I think Lowell was willing, at any time, to take up the task, observe a Lenten self-discipline; but that his language did not let him. Or rather: certain habits of his language, mostly bad habits indulged in his later books. The language of *Day by Day* is mostly sullen, surly, as if all the joy of words had leaked away or gone sour. This is probably bound to happen when a poetry of seizure, like Lowell's in the early books, tires of itself, gets bored with its repetitions. It is the price a poet has to pay for a hair-raising art when his energy falls off: he lapses into poses, the gestures of habit, going through the motions.

It is sad. It would be wonderful to report that *Day by Day* is a superb book, the ripest fruit of Lowell's art; but it is not. What I particularly miss is Lowell's patience: he could be patient, when he was at ease in his language. We do not think patience his character, or his most visible sign, but, looking back over the *Selected Poems* (1976), I find myself stopping not at the famous dramatic things but at the quieter moments, when every force came together and the words sounded with ease. I am thinking of one such moment which tells against the drift of my argument and says that, when the going was good, Lowell could indeed lose himself for a while. Here is "Death of Anne Boleyn," a poem from *History* which didn't touch me very much when I first read it, but it touches me now:

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Summer hail flings crystals on the window—
they wrapped the Lady Ann's head in a white handkerchief . . . .
To Wolsey, *the nightcrow,* but to Anthony Froude,
stoic virtue spoke from her stubborn lips and chin—
five adulteries in three years of marriage;
the game was hotly charged. "I hear say I'll
not die till noon; I am very sorry therefore,
I thought to be dead this hour and past my pain."
Her jailer told her that beheading was no pain—
"It is subtle." "I have a little neck,"
she said, and put her hands about it laughing.
They guessed she had much pleasure and joy in death—
no foreigners admitted. By the King's abundance
the scene was open to any Englishman.

The poem exists in at least three versions: there may be even more. I count only the revised and enlarged *Notebook* and the *History* and now the *Selected Poems,* different texts in each case. The differences are interesting, but they make another day's work. Most of the narrative is taken from the second volume of James Anthony Froude's *History of England from the Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth,* but there is a striking detail which I have not seen in Froude. In the first published version of the poem the reference to the spectators in the last line was introduced by a weak phrase: "But thanks to her husband . . . ." In the second version this was replaced by: "though by the King's abundance." The change is a stroke of patience, a superb invention:

Her Husband hoped she'd have small displeasure in her death—
no foreigners, though by the King's abundance
the scene was open to any Englishman.

In the final version Lowell brought the King in only once, as in Froude, where it is the chaplain Mr. Kingston who says, "I have seen many men, and also women, executed, and they have been in great sorrow; and to my knowledge this lady hath much joy and pleasure in death." But "abundance" is retained, thank God.

This is the Lowell I most admire. Not the most typical Lowell, I concede: that man is probably the moody, violent poet who took every occasion to present himself in that spirit. What troubles me about him is not that he was so vexed with himself and others and with circumstance but that he was so vexed with the English language; so often used its gifts as if they were insults. Patience came slow and hard to such a poet; so I warm to it when it comes through the turbulence and flows into the rhythm. "Death of Anne Boleyn" is much indebted to Froude for fact, but the rhythm of the poem is pure, patient Lowell.

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ROBERT MC DOWELL

The Spirit in Mid-Winter Rises

ALL POETS WHO PUBLISH A GREAT DEAL, and most who do not but would like to, dream of some day holding forth in a "major" collection. It might be a book that breaks new ground in technique. Or it might reflect a lifetime achievement. It is usually produced when the poet is middle-aged. Now and then, as in the case of Yeats, it comes later. It is almost never the product of a youthful hand. It usually comes late enough, in fact, for its merit to be recognized by the established literati. This implies that they are its contemporaries. But the truth is that the work outleaps their time, past and future. They accept it, not because of any insight they possess, but because word of mouth says that they should. Also, they may have the vague, uneasy notion that they would be foolish—more foolish than usual—to do anything else. A "major" book is above criticism. It exerts considerable sway and is the poet's great triumph over the natives who shot darts at him all through his memorably obscure career.

After he has published a "major" collection, a poet can be excused for some time. A few may groan a little, but nobody will long lament if he never approximates that height again. They will think that you were lucky to have been there once. It would be still more rare for a poet, in the span of seven years, to follow *two* "major" collections with a *third*. But in his new book, *The Snow Poems*, that is exactly what A. R. Ammons has done.[1] In *Collected Poems: 1951–1971*, in *Sphere: The Form of a Motion*, and in *The Snow Poems* this prolific poet shows no signs of letting up.

In an age when most poets have pulled in their claws to confront us with mushy, probing soft paws, Ammons comes at us with his talons bared, aiming at the Universal Heart. The man's drive is unique in that it does not produce bulk at the expense of quality. Few poets match his productivity or his level of excellence. When we sit down to Ammons we need never grieve about warmed leftovers. With a painter's eye for color and detail he writes about the things he sees. You will not catch him astride the dark merely imagining—he reports *and* imagines. This way, for the true poet, is the one way. The risks and rewards are infinitely greater. There are pitfalls, but they are overshadowed by sustained periods of unbridled flight. Even when Ammons stumbles, even when he makes mistakes, he is never sloppy or less than completely honest about himself. He appears to be riding the crest of a wave with no descent in sight. In that state of grace it looks as if he could go on forever.

The Snow Poems contains 119 poems in which an admirable craftsmanship is indisputable. But taken together the poems also read as one long poem. The sense of the book is best assimilated through this approach. It is refreshing to encounter a contemporary long poem that is not just another self-indulgent joke, another tedious and forgettable specimen of

[1] THE SNOW POEMS, by *A. R. Ammons*. Norton. $12.50.

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"literature." How tired we are of encountering poems in which there is nothing more substantial than random words on a page! *The Snow Poems* has little to do with such a tradition.

Ammons brings to his new work familiar concerns: the on-going, minute examination of his inexhaustible world, the continual reduction and reconstruction of the Self. There are new wrinkles as well: encroaching middle age (the poet's fiftieth year) and the gradual deterioration of memory. All are linked together by the symbolic snow. It is an apt device that functions ably on two levels. There is the level that Melville pondered in the whiteness of the whale, the sacred, white dog of the Iroquois, the white bear of the polar ice, the white stallion of the plains. "This elusive quality it is," Ishmael says, "which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds." For Ammons the "object terrible in itself" is the oblivion of which Death is the gatekeeper.

Snow also functions on a more prosaic level that reminds the poet of the shutdown of exterior exertion. He finds himself deep in a severe East Coast winter. People anxiously watch the weather forecasts and bear confinement with that gritty patience familiar to those acquainted with the harshness of winter. In such a claustrophobic schema the Self cannot be ignored. The frigid solitude spurs Ammons into interior monologues, the extensive periods of talking to one's Self, into the face-to-face encounter with the terror that is the whiteness of the whale.

Conflict is at the center of poetry. No poem can be successful without it. The poem must do more than settle for a presentational approach. It is not enough to say, "this is conflict—I'm done." A poet has to work it out in an objective way that comprehends both sides. A poet must be Cain and Abel. Therein tension lies, and that makes the poem go.

The ability to create tension and sustain it is sadly missing from much contemporary poetry. Whether poets have forgotten how to develop tension in their work or whether they even recognize it in themselves I cannot say. It is enough for me that Ammons is not plagued by this difficulty:

> I get so much good out of my
> neighbors: they don't
> speak or visit
> but they come
> home from a trip
> and put on the lights or I
> look out the window on a cold
> night and see one or two
> of their windows lit and get
> neighborly feelings
> "This Is"

Here is an Ammons trademark: the toughminded treatment of the modern, suburban man. It is no subjective observation from a poet hunched in

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a corner, drooling with self-pity, pounding a gavel to certify each arbitrary notion that comes to mind. His compassion is unquestionable. Even the most skeptical reader must see that Ammons fully comprehends both sides, that he too puts on the lights and neither speaks nor visits.

In the hands of this poet there is a poignant grandeur, far from pity, that marks this peculiar American inability to make contact. We are brought face-to-face with the realization that, though there are more inroads to an "equal" society than ever before, there are still Silas Laphams lurking in each of us. We make money. We take out the garbage and never quite feel that we are doing it correctly. We pull out weeds and drive our children to school. We attend meetings and watch television and make more money . . . and we are terribly alone. Ammons feels the weight of this dilemma and yet, he heroically transcends it. It is the major Whitmanesque achievement of an uncommonly big-hearted man who embraces his country and sees in it the material for a still better place.

How does Ammons do it? In *The Snow Poems* it is accomplished by numerous passages alike in tone to the one quoted above. Time and again he takes out the garbage or putters in the yard. He drives his child to school. He eats. He watches televised football and endures tedious committee meetings at the university. Often he will write in the conversational modes he is used to hearing. The language is simple, clear and pliant. It is occasionally wrenched by contemporary words of science, words like "Curvature," "Numeration," "interpenetrations," "discontinuity," and "differentiation." Normally, such words in a poem make me shudder. But when Ammons uses them I merely quiver cozily like a fawned-over aspic. In short, we see this poet doing the things that you or I do every day. But he also does some things that maybe we don't do. He sits at the window, for instance, and watches a bird in a tree:

> the woodlark,
> the lilt and liquid
> upward-breaking spiral,
> sound's artesian spring (the
> dogs get excited in the thicket
> rushing up the pheasant, making
> plain hens fly off
> chirping) but
> I love the mockingbird, childhood's
> bird, most, and . . .
>
> I wonder when in spring
> musing he'll
> dropping burst the first note,
> sweep a cluster of shatters into song,
> and then fire the air with
> a fire-line glinting unwinding . . .
>
> "You Can't Get It Right"

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Or he watches the snow fall, transforming the houses. He watches and "snow/ghosts stand up/ and walk off the roof." With Ammons' help we can see them, too. These lines confirm that his gift does not simply aim for the breadbasket. It impresses the ear as well. For Ammons has always been a first-rate lyricist. The more I read his work the more I am convinced that he can (and will) do anything with the language that he wants. He is just that precise. He has that much control and, bless him, he has an ear. Nowhere is this more obvious than in his brazen and brilliant word play. Listen to "Hard fist/hard turd/cool whip/soup dip" or "up yr nose/with a rubber hose," "in yr ear/with a hornet's rear," "up yr ass/ with a blade of grass." Nobody uses profanity so well. This poet has a winning sense of humor and he knows how to employ it as a life raft. It enables the reader to catch his breath before the next luminous observation.

The overall achievement of *The Snow Poems* becomes more remarkable when I consider that encroaching age is a recurrent, central concern. The poet has reached his fiftieth year and must contend, in a furious winter, with the ominous implications. The comfortable promises of youth have faded. He is haunted by ghosts: "oh, my father,/I am one of the few/left to miss you/I do not miss you much." Surrounded by material gain and artistic accomplishment, by fifty years of experience and the necessity, born of instinct, to make something worthwhile out of his remaining years, Ammons meets the lonely struggle with perfect honesty. Perceiving the limitations in whatever he attempts, the poet expresses himself with the graceful ease of an eloquent river:

> all I ever know is
> rigor between the shoulderblades,
> lumber in the gut,
> hard theory-light in the head:
> I process life by shaking,
> I'm a sifter: . . .
> "Forecast for Today (Winter's Firstday)"

Ammons knows himself. What emerges is an indomitable spirit forged in conflict, tempered by compassion, ready to advance on a questionable future with confidence and delight. Richard Eberhart said on accepting last year's National Book Award: "Poets should not die for poetry but should live for it." Nobody better personifies this sentiment than Ammons. He is as huge as the country he inhabits, as compassionate as it would like to be:

> they say it took some days
> for the cries in No Man's Land
> to die down: first
> there was a noise
> of pain

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but a few dawns and dusks
settled things
down to here and there
a filament of dissent
and then the dawn came wherein
the peace was incredible
"A Flock of My Days"

A. R. Ammons attains such peace by earning it daily. He contemplates, attacks, retreats, forgives, cries, loves. He knows and communicates his knowledge in a way that is untainted by self-interest. There are valuable lessons to be culled from his experience. Readers and writers of poetry everywhere would do well to heed them.

A Hudson Review Publication

Poems by Ghalib

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in collaboration with

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JAMES FINN COTTER

Poetry Reading

NO ONE HAS MADE A STUDY OF OUR NUMBERS (as far as I know), but there are enough of us around to make a difference to poetry. Of course, the academic chairs, the huge auditoriums, and the spoken word records have threatened to replace us; some poets even smirk knowingly when we are mentioned. James Hazard, for example, says outright on the dust jacket of his selected poetry:[1] "Most of the poems in this book—even the longest pieces—I have thought of as I wrote them as 'scripts' for me to read aloud. Any content they have comes second to that first fact." Hazard does not have us in mind at all; we hardly exist for him. His poems sound gossipy and homey with just the right dash of rebellion. We meet him (often), his wife, kids, neighbors, mothers in supermarkets, Alan Ladd, Veronica Lake. But, as Hazard himself observes in one aside, much of it is "you know / blah blah blah."

We admit that the oral tradition has preceded the Gutenberg galaxy and that we now inhabit a global House of Fame. But one could do worse than be a reader of verses. For quite a while we have been browsing in bookshops, borrowing from libraries or even buying the books praised by the critics. We sit up late at night with a new collection of a favorite author or some just-discovered talent in the Yale Younger Poets series. We check through the *American Poetry Review, Poetry,* the reviews, roundups, and chronicles for new poets. Poems are our novels, we read to read more. With so much poetry being published, we cannot be that much of a minority. But I sometimes wonder: are there more poets writing today than there are readers of poetry? A question not to be asked. From here, amidst cartons of review books, the number of poets appears legion.

At times, we readers may feel more at home in the company of the eighteenth-century Japanese hermit Ryōkan than with some of our own contemporaries. In John Stevens' translation,[2] we meet a man who makes room for others in his love of solitary landscapes and poetry. While delighting in "fresh morning snow in front of the shrine," he can also throw snowballs with passing children. Ryōkan remembers lost friends, walks to the village for another day of begging, drinks sakè with a farmer and his wife. His poems offer to share his own thoughts and sensations. Here is one (untitled) example:

> Intermittent rain—in my hermitage
> A solitary light flickers as dreams return.
> Outside, the sound of falling raindrops.

[1] A HIVE OF SOULS: SELECTED POEMS 1968–1976, by *James Hazard*. The Crossing Press. $3.95.

[2] ONE ROBE, ONE BOWL: THE ZEN POETRY OF RYŌKAN, trans. *John Stevens*. Weatherhill. $6.95; $3.50 paperback.

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A crow sits in darkness on the wall.
The fireplace is cold, no charcoal awaits my imagined visitors.
I reach for a volume of poems.
Tonight, in solitude, deep emotion.
How can I explain it the following day?

Time stands still even as it flows toward tomorrow and the poet has spoken by not saying a word. That night Roȳkan, who also wrote classical Chinese poems, might have read one of the five poets now collected by H. C. Chang in his anthology, *Nature Poetry*.[3] The tranquility of these landscapes comes alive with activity: mountain climbers, soldiers on horseback, villagers on the way to market. Only philosophers sit still in Chinese poetry, and then not for very long. They pick up a walking stick and climb to another bracing height or silent temple. Not even nature can keep still: bamboo shoots quiver, plants crawl, rivers jump and tumble, cliffs beetle and plunge. Liu Tsung-yüan in his "The Shrine in a Stone Pagoda in Fa-hua Temple" observes of a craggy hillside:

It appears as if the earth's veins had erupted
Or a pillar fallen out of heaven—

Climbing, the poet asks himself: "Why all the effort to make our way up?" He answers:

In search of the unusual as far as the eye would reach,
Straining the ear to hear each harmonious sound—
The meaning of this I grasped that moment
And my mind was awakened as never before.

H. C. Chang's edition benefits from generous notes and an introduction; he quotes letters and prefaces to help us read the poems more intelligently. For the most part, his translations appear smooth and formal; however, I hear at times a stilted note that echoes Charlie Chan's dialogues, like "[I] am rewarded by a sight that soon comforts me." The sights and sounds do come through when I hear "the cicadas chirp in the evening breeze" and share with Wang Wei an "Evening in Autumn among the Hills":

The rains have fallen. The hills are bare
On this clear autumn's evening.
Over the pines a moon has risen.
The stream is cascading on the rocks.
The bamboos are loud with the chatter of returning washerwomen.
The lotus leaves sway before a lowered fishing-boat.
Green grass is everywhere for tired feet and eyes,
And even a fastidious sightseer will choose to linger.

[3] CHINESE LITERATURE, VOL. 2: NATURE POETRY. ed. and trans. *H. C. Chang*. Columbia University Press. $8.00.

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In his book of poems, *A Voice in the Mountain,*[4] Peter Davison makes a sightseer want to linger at his farm in the salt marshes of West Gloucester. In "The Hawk of the Mind," for example, we can meditate like a philosopher-poet on man's ominous presence:

> The maples are darkening in the August day.
> The standing grass is drying into hay.
> Swallows, fledged and grown, chatter in the sky
> or warm themselves on the rooftree.
> Their blood has not yet been spilled,
> but the hawk of the mind is waiting.

A shadow of violence often falls over the fields, walls, and animals of these poems—a shadow cast by man the predator and destroyer. Destructiveness threatens the landscapes and landmarks of the past. In Italy, where butchers shoot birds in the six-month hunting season, the poet pictures the birds for sale:

> Thrushes, larks, and other speckled singers
> hang up to ripen, dangling by their bloody
> beaks, eyes glassy, feather coats bedraggled.
> ("*Circolo Della Caccia*")

And in New England, farmyards collect junk and old mills crumble. In "Haskell's Mill," Davison contrasts the past's productivity with the present's opportunism:

> My neighbors breed, and spin their wheels, and hold
> their land in hopes developers will buy
> to spare them the indignity of ruins.
> Their houses fill up with wornout machines
> and in their woodlots cars are left for dead,
> oozing a smell of gasoline and rubber
> consumed to make a city of the country
> where nothing is produced and little earned.

In keeping with the pastoral tradition, the poet reminds us that nature alone remains alive:

> High tide pours in, kingfishers skim the pool,
> crabs nibble at the rising of the tide,
> and gulls search hopefully along the brink,
> take flight for higher ground till the tide turns.

Through the poet's memory, the abandoned mill works again:

> At every touch white flour puffed and drizzled
> down through the funnel in the nether millstone

[4] A VOICE IN THE MOUNTAIN, by *Peter Davison.* Atheneum. $4.95.

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to rise like bleached sand in an hourglass
until the hopper filled, and then the mealsacks,
and then the lighters waiting for the ships
to weigh anchor and set sail for the islands.

"Haskell's Mill" proves what a good long poem can do: inform and delight. It involves the reader in a scene and then re-creates another scene within it; this is what poetry is for: to keep the memory going. Davison has enough poems like this one to make this collection—his sixth—a pleasure to pass on to friends. Among the poems to recommend: "Making Much of Orioles," "Day of Wrath," "Cross Cut," "House Holding," "The Poem in the Park," and "Head Stone." You will find others equally appropriate.

Howard Nemerov's *Collected Poems*[5] is the season's cornucopia of poetry. It gathers nine previous collections in its five-hundred-plus pages: something for everyone here. Nemerov has mastered the poetic form which others—principally Yeats, Frost, and Stevens—fashioned for modern verse. Whether describing poetics or football, his poems are always readable, clear, controlled, and self-contained. Everything must be meticulously observed and faultlessly set down; take "Lobsters," for instance:

Here at the Super Duper, in a glass tank
Supplied by a rill of cold fresh water
Running down a glass washboard at one end
And siphoned off at the other, and so
Perpetually renewed, a herd of lobster
Is made available to the customer
Who may choose whichever one he wants
To carry home and drop into boiling water
And serve with a sauce of melted butter.

The breathless syntax and clumsy lines mimic the poor lobster and parody the elegant diction ("Perpetually renewed") others have employed on loftier subjects. However, the surface barely conceals a sense of bizarre madness in the whole process by which lobsters and poems are served up to customers: a "blind abyss" opens beneath. Nemerov is best when suggesting that unseen dimension, but too often he sermonizes his observations and overexplains. He is a middle distance runner whose long poems (two one-act biblical plays included here, for example) and witty epigrams fail to hit the mark. He overreaches for wisdom or descends to mere cleverness. But what knowledge he gives us in between:

I stand and watch for minutes by the pond
The snowflakes falling on the open water.
Though I get cold, and though it tells me nothing,
Or maybe just because it tells me nothing,
I have to stand and watch the infinite white

[5] THE COLLECTED POEMS OF HOWARD NEMEROV, by *Howard Nemerov*. University of Chicago Press. $20.00.

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Particulate chaos of the falling snow
Abolished in the black and waiting water.

Unfortunately, the poem, "This, That & the Other," lengthens out into an abstract debate between dream and reality, brought on by watching snow. Nemerov is more himself with butterflies, Brueghel, and Bach, and with seeing his son off to first grade or thinking as a tree. His early academic poems, mythological excursions, his topical poems, especially during the Vietnam War, these fill out this volume and make us wish for another *Selected Poems*. Meanwhile, you can spend weeks picking and choosing from this one.

Dave Smith's fourth collection of poems, *Cumberland Station*,[6] also leaves me with mixed feelings. With the opening poem, "The Last Morning," we know we are hearing a voice that is experienced and trustworthy. Smith writes:

Alone in the camp, all others dumb
with the humming sleep of the reeds
and the dew so thick in their hair
it flashes like brilliant insects,
I get up and go down to the river.

The river current, early light, salmon, and tree roots complete the scene: we are there, listening. The poet swims in the water ("It is that easy to begin a passage") and dries his clothes. Seeing a wolverine and trout, hearing water and a beaver, he remembers "children with black, hungry eyes, men / cutting arrows where the elders bud." The landscape has been again made human, and the poem celebrates the occasion. Smith has more trouble when he leaves the woods for the city. His well-intentioned eagerness to identify with workers, prostitutes, Blacks, drunks, old ladies, and divorcees smacks more of Edgar Bergen, than of Walt Whitman. His personal city poems are more successful, the title poem above all. In "Cumberland Station," the poet imagines himself returning to his home town, in economic ruin, with people unemployed and drinking themselves to death. He speaks to his grandfather who wonders why he ever left (thank God he did!). The town is a place of gray walls, stunned faces, drunken children, and "steps so big / it takes hours to mount them." He concludes:

and, Grandfather, I wish I had the guts
to tell you this is a place I hope
I never have to go through again.

Smith is strongest when he centers on his own hard experiences, as he does in "First Hunt at Smithfield," "One Question, Two Seasons,"

[6] CUMBERLAND STATION, by *Dave Smith*. University of Illinois Press. $7.95; $3.45 paperback.

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"Picking Cherries," "Some Good Luck in Lightfoot," and (the best of his angling poems) "Night Fishing for Blues."

In *By the Wreckmaster's Cottage,*[7] Paula Rankin also dramatizes herself in a variety of roles, from suicidal child to explorer. Her psychological intensity makes her work convincing and, in this first collection of her poems, her style sustains the intensity. In "The Decoy Carver," for example, she personalizes the contemporary sense of loss by a unique testament:

> . . . Once I was the best
> at hearing the pulse inside logs,
> at timing my scalpel to uncover wings,
> feathers, eyes that go on staring.
> Now cataracts cloud the passage of light,
> forcing me to look where lash-blinks
> provide no intermission.

Despite the heavy phrasing in the final line, the image has shaped itself into words, and we are caught up in the act of the poem. The wood carver dreams of being God, sculpting real birds, "a worker of wonders in skin." A tourist, the poet descends into the New Market Caverns, then imagines the man who first discovered this bottomless hole "with not even a flashlight / to pick up the pulse of black water." Everyone here has a story to tell, the catalog people, bus passengers, ferryman, the obese, and the insane. Here is a world of high Gothic with all the gargoyles intact. Like Dave Smith, Rankin sets her poems on the desolate Virginia shore, among wrecked houses and shoal-water muck. (Smith, in fact, praises this book on its jacket blurb.) Sometimes Rankin is too clever, as when she has us "using our heads like match-ends / to strike dialogues between ourselves." But from the first "Poem for Actors," this poet knows the roles she wants to play and how to play them.

W. D. Snodgrass has chosen a strange part for himself in *The Führer Bunker;*[8] he plays the entire cast of Hitler's last days, nine characters in all. The dramatic monologues are crammed with historical details which appear, in Snodgrass' words, "outrageous, silly, monstrous, downright incredible." He tells us that the facts are such; the poet's inventions are modest in comparison. The trouble I have with the result, however, has nothing to do with truth or fiction. The characters are obnoxious, their speeches mere babble, and the content frivolous. If the reader wants his history or poetry, he should look elsewhere. Snodgrass is wasting his talent on that crew: let the dead bury the dead.

War provides no make-believe nightmare for Gerald McCarthy; his *War Story*[9] relives the pains of battle and readjustment at home. The book marks the seasons from the first days of summer in Vietnam, through

[7] BY THE WREAKMASTER'S COTTAGE, by *Paula Rankin.* Carnegie-Mellon University Press. $3.50.

[8] THE FÜHRER BUNKER: A CYCLE OF POEMS IN PROGRESS, by *W. D. Snodgrass.* Boa Editons. $8.95; $4.95 paperback.

[9] WAR STORY, by *Gerald McCarthy.* The Crossing Press. $2.95.

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homecoming in the fall, winter groping and waiting, to the lonely impasse at the end of March. In the twenty-two poem sequence, "War Story," the soldier recounts the events of war: bodies shoved in plastic bags to be sent back (a leftover limb is made to "fit in somewhere" in the next shipment), being shot and wounded ("Jesus Christ, somebody pull the switch"), and later watching an American Legion parade ("I am a communist"). At the end, he comes full circle: he is the enemy he set out to destroy. The cycle continues as all the seasons freeze into summer fighting, fall and winter searching, the spring that does not arrive. The poems, modeled on a Hemingway style of figureless statements, move the reader by their stark, simple truth; as McCarthy admits:

> I don't know what it is that's kept me going.
> At nineteen I stood at night and watched
> an airfield mortared. A plane that was to take
> me home, burning, men running out of the flames.
>
> Seven winters have slipped away,
> the war still follows me.
> Never in anything have I found
> a way to throw off the dead.
> ("The Sound of Guns")

The poet's university advisers tell him to write about things other than Vietnam, like the four elements. Ironically he shapes his subject matter from the scorched earth and empty sidewalks, the firebombs, foamy beer, and planes carrying men in air. Not since Michael Casey's *Obscenities* has war poetry been this good.

John Ashbery's elegant observations on the American scene note the same emptiness but strike quite another chord. He wonders aloud in "Pyrography" from his new book, *Houseboat Days*:[10]

> . . . How are we to inhabit
> This space from which the fourth wall is invariably
> missing,
> As in a stage-set or dollhouse, except by staying as
> we are,
> In lost profile, facing the stars, with dozens of as yet
> Unrealized projects, and a strict sense
> Of time running out, of evening presenting
> The tactfully folded-over bill?

How are we, in brief, to keep from being bored? But brevity is not the soul of Ashbery's wit. He espouses variations on a theme by Hazard: "you know / blah blah blah." He Do the Police in Different Voices; he is a nightingale among the Sweeneys. Lowbrow Kenneth Koch can make such sound and fury funny, but Ashbery is too highbrow for that. He is a listener's rather than a reader's poet, as he shows in his poems and asides

[10] HOUSEBOAT DAYS, by *John Ashbery*. Viking. $7.95; $2.95 paperback.

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on poetry, in his parodies of T. S. Eliot like "Blue Sonata," in his recasting of myth like the Orpheus and Eurydice story, and in verbal exercises like the long poem, "Fantasia on 'The Nut-Brown Maid.' " He aims at the eye and ear, not at the mind and heart. His poems mirror paintings, movie and novel scenes; they echo commercials, Camus, and his friends' conversations. Ashbery can be winning in describing a young girl met on a train and then trail off on a lengthy chat about the nation's unhappiness. Is he putting us on? Just enjoying himself.

If Ashbery's poems often sound like sugared sonnets among his private friends, Richard Hugo's *31 Letters and 13 Dreams*[11] makes no bones about the limit of its circulation. Most of these verse letters are addressed to fellow poets and are datelined from cities in Europe and the West. The poet describes himself traveling, fishing, drinking, writing, finding a new love. He is lonely, tender, gabby, flabby, and "humble." Reading this book, I felt like an FBI agent opening a suspect's mail. Something suspicious in this "Letter to Hanson from Miami": "I keep feeling revolutionary / but I have no cause." He might dynamite the swimming pool, but that's the booze talking. No threat here, just a director of a creative writing program making every duty poetical and letting us in on his waking and dream life. Hugo's heart (he hates the word, he says) is in the right place; his ulcer burns with a hard gemlike flame. In "Letter to Simic from Boulder," he remembers World War II matter-of-factly:

> I don't apologize for the war, or what I was. I was
> willingly confused by the times. I think I even believed
> in heroics (for others, not for me). I believed the
> necessity
> of that suffering world, hoping it would learn not to do
> it again. But I was young. The world never learns.

But this self-parody is itself self-indulgent; nothing redeems its flat lack of invention and its ho-hum style. Even in his sympathy for the Nisei, Hugo cannot resist a cheap shot: "In Germany, Jews. In America, Japs." He cannot recall the Japanese soldier who, after serving in the American army, returns to injury at home, without interjecting banality: "Haven't seen him in years. Why do I think / of him today?" We do not know or care, for we are mere eavesdroppers on the monologue. These letters and dreams do not seem to address anybody; they all sound alike. Richard Hugo's huge ego may be richer than most readers' tastes.

The same smack of being spoiled by poetic success sours Robert Bly's new collection, *This Body is Made of Camphor and Gopherwood*.[12] Nowadays, everything Bly touches becomes a holy cause and reason for another book. Here he consecrates "the often neglected[?] medium of the prose poem." Like the snail in the book's twenty-one drawings by Gendron Jensen, Bly

[11] 31 LETTERS AND 13 DREAMS: POEMS by *Richard H. Hugo*. Norton. $7.95; $2.95 paperback.

[12] THIS BODY IS MADE OF CAMPHOR AND GOPHERWOOD, by *Robert Bly*. Harper and Row. $7.95; $3.95 paperback.

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has crept into the shell of his own meditations and remains absorbed in Sufi poetry, Rilke, protozoa, animals, woods, and fog. The pilgrim's mecca is a small black stone, mysterious and impenetrable. One may admire such pure isolation, but the poet does not help us to share it. The result is not mysticism but solipsism, and we are left out in the cold by passages like this one from "The Pail": "So for two days I gathered ecstasies from my own body, I rose up and down, surrounded only by bare wood and bare air and some gray cloud, and what was inside me came so close to me, and I lived and died!" In earlier collections—especially *Sleepers Joining Hands*—Bly could convince us of a mystical experience by imagining and hinting at its beauty. Too often these poems are overwrought and pretentious. The one delightful piece here describes the poet's children and their friends preparing to put on a play. Except for this "Coming In for Supper," a reader would not know a family existed or, rather, mattered in the poet's hermetic world. Even the love poem that closes the volume, "The Cry Going Out over Pastures," appears to be too rhetorical to be moving, talking more about the poet than the loved one: "I first met you when I had been alone for nine days." A strange way to greet someone you love.

The pits of this current narcissism must be Michael Palmer's *Without Music*,[13] another elegantly produced book (publishers dote on their poets) which sets out to say nothing but musically, to mix metaphors, and to dance the light fantastic. Palmer trips across the floor of memory, throwing hankies to friends, but not giving the rest of us a clue what his antics intend. References to unknown people and places abound, but he jokingly annotates the obvious: "Thou art the thing itself / (King Lear)." The rest is syrupy surrealism with obfuscations like "passages . . .

> translucent as
> the old Stalinist says
> dolphins in their course, the forest is
> hazardous, 'familiar,' its hidden
> events.
> ("Tenth Symmetrical Poem")

In *una selva oscura*, the pilgrim has lost his map of the way. The madness in Palmer's method hardly serves as a guide through the forest.

I opened Robert Huff's *The Ventriloquist*[14] with foreboding about its title, but was glad to find the title poem an elegy for a tipsy friend who made chandeliers, hamster cages, and frozen daiquiris miraculously vocal. Remembering him, the poet hears flowers speak and a model sailboat whisper "Cutty Sark." Huff's fondness for puns and jokes enables him to maintain a note of unsentimental irony in elegies for his mother and father, for Delmore Schwartz and other friends. "Rainbow," a poem about his daughter's first encounter with death on a hunting trip, "Get-

[13] WITHOUT MUSIC, by *Michael Palmer*. Black Sparrow Press. $15; $4 paperback.
[14] THE VENTRILOQUIST: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS, by *Robert Huff*. University Press of Virginia. $6.95.

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ting Drunk with Daughter," and "Porcupines," a prose-poem description of killing those troublesome rodents, also possess the same tough quality. However, the poet cannot resist throwing his own voice around the room. He is a medicine man barking firewater, W. C. Fields preparing for a poetry reading, and a fireman seeing the world in flames. We hear Caitlin upbraiding Dylan Thomas in his cups and a medium reliving a Jesuit's torture at the hands of the Iroquois. The efforts, legitimate enough, wear thin and disappear into vapidity when Huff assumes the tone of Robert Lowell's Lord Weary, dropping dates, narrating dream sequences, decrying "the letter of the law," and picturing a pillar in a "white skull cap." The style—tight syntax and harsh rhythms—of early Lowell intrudes an unnatural, anachronistic element in an otherwise authoritative work.

Jane Shore finds a number of roles for herself in *Eyelevel*:[15] astronaut, astronomer, Lot's wife, fortuneteller, and lifeguard. She declares that she randomly releases these lives into the world "like doves!" This poet has solved the difficulty of placing her own voice as the persona of each poem—she is the same rescuing adventurer in all her roles. She played her part in the beginning:

> Turned out of Eden,
> I was Adam
> naming the animals.
> I was Eve naming my sons.
> ("Second Story Sunlight")

Shore also defines the space she occupies; the Quaker Oats box she holds contains her own image. Windows, doors, Advent calendar cutouts, rooms, houses make up the self-contained mirror, the pea in which the princess sleeps. So the child in the glass paperweight "is always caught outside / regardless of the weather." When the storm blows, who will bring the child in? The first poem, "Witness," tells us: the firefighter poet will tug the boy "jackknifed in the pipe" out of the mud, ooze, and dark and release him into the cold air. 'Witness" re-creates a thrilling rescue, with searchlights, flashing squad car, lasso, teamwork, until at last the child "whined like nothing human in my arms." Poems like this one are events: something has happened in them. The real has been imagined, the imagined made real. On its own terms and in confidence, the poem works, as it does time and again in this impressive first book. In "Landscape with Trees," the poet observes that "The 'ideal reader' never gets distracted with meanings." Our reading involves directed guesswork, for "The tree I imagine you can only approximate." Nothing needs to be forced since the poet knows exactly the grounds on which the two of us meet:

> I am probably sitting in a house with a view.
> The literalness of 'the window' can only be guessed at
> When the bird of this poem chooses to fly through.

No barrier exists at all when "this poem" takes off from the page.

[15] EYELEVEL, by *Jane Shore*. University of Massachusetts Press. $7.00; $3.50 paperback.

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The clear horizons of a poet's purpose also shine through in Peter Everwine's collection, *Keeping the Night*,[16] especially in his memories of an Italian grandfather immigrating to America, marrying, fathering children: "*Ricordo, ricordo* / like a thread. . . ." In "*Perosa Canavese*," we find the poet revisiting the home country in hope of seeing "the face of the village / my people spoke of / in the hour before sleep." He finds instead the stone in a cemetery "saying the alphabet of my childhood," for he has brought to the polished stone memories of a landscape of his own making—enough for a poem if not for the living search of love. Likewise in "Distance," the poet sees the departing light and stars rising out of the hills, "—old kings and animals / marching," and he concludes:

> . . . Once more I find myself
> standing as on a dark pier, holding
> an enormous rope of silence.

In his loneliness, Everwine has found the tie that binds him to the earth and to his readers.

In the opening poem, "Rooms," of *A Place to Stand*,[17] Philip Holmes finds himself stock-still in a kind of Chinese box: a room, a house, a city street enclose him. He observes:

> The factories are idle;
> their histories stand about me,
> floors and walls, the street
> contained and ending in them.

His window shows him the way he has come, nothing more than "room after room, word / after word." In subsequent poems, time as well as space defines the area of imagination when childhood comes back to the poet and he recalls his departure from England and later return. Holmes wants to see things whole, motionless:

> He tried to hold it still, but everything
> came to pieces in his hands.

Holmes has an equal power in describing the contours of his landscapes, as in "September Frost":

> The hut was folded in the hills
> and the hills stood off, range on range
> to autumn, to the sharp edge of the world;
> the bracken yellow on their slopes.

But the poet wanders too far into his own scenery and most of the book takes us on a guided tour of Han Shan's China, Athos, Kibbutz Zikim, California, Puritan New England, and Richard Rogers' sixteenth-century

[16] KEEPING THE NIGHT, by *Peter Everwine*. Atheneum. $3.95.
[17] A PLACE TO STAND, by *Philip Holmes*. Anvil Press. £2.25.

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England. As with Lowell's *History*, the reader seems to be looking at home movies of the past where everyone turns out to be a relative. Holmes overdoes the travelogue commentary and takes over our itinerary besides. The reader has little to do but follow the poet become preacher and guide. We miss that room where we began with a place to stand.

In that room, doors open to doors and images recede into mirrors. Arthur Gregor in *The Past Now*[18] attempts to hold the perfect image, the swan or spacebird, focused in memory, but, since memory does not suffice, he wants to reduce the image to its archetypal myth. Gregor is a Platonist whose quest inspires each poem as part of his journey where all is "as it was meant to be." In "A Defiance," he states that "the mind shall have no preference"; it will be a *tabula rasa* for rain, tree, and fruit to occur. Gregor succeeds when he begins with specifics, but too many poems start off as thoughts in search of images. Their wings burn and the ideas fall to the ground. To these elusive flights, I prefer a poem like "Approaching a Bridge in Northern California" which gives us mudflats, seagulls, and shellfish before serving up "the languor / of space and time." Gregor is also a romantic who willingly takes risks to achieve emotional effects. He yearns and weeps in his poetry; he knows he may be thought "outdated." Sometimes the sighs for love lost slip into sentimentality ("From Where") and his aspiring to the ideal descends to bombast ("Enough"), and even his modulated style breaks down with absurdities like "All of me / cried a cry I could not shout" ("Wrapped in sleep's shroud"). But Gregor, a mature poet able to weather his own weaknesses, grows more sure in his seventh collection. He has defined his goals and marked his poetic boundaries; he has developed a style that is musical and colloquial; he aims to do more and one feels he will find a way, for he senses the fullness that still exists from the past and he studies the secret of "The emptiness of a world":

> the gold-leaf symmetry
> the looks of supplicants
> the smiles of those whose inner glow
> on stones and peeling canvases
> shines on in spite of centuries

C. G. Hanzlicek in *Stars*[19] has staked out his claim in the West, but he is restoring it to the Indians. The title poem states that white men wander through stars after death while red men rest among the water and stones. The poet hopes that when he dies, "I won't be ready for stars /They'll have to bury me." A consummation devoutly to be wished by us all. Playing Indian, however, is a poetic fashion that needs more than incantation and Injun talk about corn, crow, catfish, and (of course) coyote. Too many poems repeat these motifs in ritual chant. The poet is on surer ground with his final autobiographical sequence entitled "Eclipse." In one passage he describes how two grosbeaks smashed into a window where he and his wife stood; she screamed, "They hit so hard /Against

[18] THE PAST NOW, by *Arthur Gregory*. Doubleday. $5.95.
[19] STARS, by *C. G. Hanzlicek*. University of Missouri Press. $6.00.

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our faces in the glass." Husband and wife watch the two birds twitch and die in the garden. It is a beautiful emblem of death, sudden, inexplicable, and moving:

> And there is the death
> That will choose me
> Invisible
> Shivering like a pane of glass
> In a high wind
>
> I'll wait to be chosen
> I'll wait with my own belief

Although the last two lines seem redundant, the image has been focused and resolved. We feel the glass shiver, the impact of the high wind as the bird of the poem flies against it.

Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets[20] contains some fine examples of poets writing about the death-event. These authors from India—all use English for their poetry—usually celebrate death as a process in things. Keki N. Daruwalla's "Death of a Bird," for example, joins love-making with hunting and ill omens. The poet shoots a queen-monal and his lover cries, "We are accursed!" But he has mastered death by killing the pheasant:

> . . . For though the bird was near dead
> its eyes flared terror like bits of dripping meat.

Daruwalla's description in "The Epileptic" holds another moment of horror in factual focus. This poem combines perfect narrative tension with psychological perception so that the reader is drawn into the scene and then let go with the rest of the street observers. This seizure is worthy of a Dostoevski novel. Gieve Patel's "On Killing a Tree" possesses a similar stark point of view, the brutal work of uprooting life explained with dry detachment. Jayanta Mahapatra invites us into a Calcutta whorehouse with the same coolness: "Walk right in. It is yours." Among other poets, Kamala Das writes frankly of her childhood and later love affairs, and A. K. Ramanujan recalls people like his father and cousins with an artist's eye for detail. These writers communicate a feeling of the landscape of India and her people. One of the best known, Nissim Ezekiel, is quoted in the Introduction as saying: "A man can do something for and in his environment by being fully what he is, by not withdrawing from it. I have not withdrawn from India."

No modern poet represents the enigma of India more completely than Nirala, whose name means "the strange one." A political outsider who satirized Gandhi and Nehru, he spearheaded the renaissance of Hindi Literature known as the Chhayavad movement. *A Season on the Earth*[21]

[20] TEN TWENTIETH CENTURY INDIAN POETS, ed. by *R. Parthasarathy*. Oxford University Press. $2.75.

[21] A SEASON ON THE EARTH: SELECTED POEMS OF NIRALA, ed. by *David Rubin*. Columbia University Press. $12.50; $4.00 paperback.

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offers a selection of Nirala's poems which run, we are told, to eleven volumes. David Rubin, who has done the selecting and translating, has provided a helpful "Afterword" on the poet's life and background. Rubin arranges his selections by themes rather than by chronology, and the title is also his own. Although Nirala's original idiom resembles that of Hopkins, Rubin smooths out the syntactical difficulties in his translation and gives us a balanced style that combines both the formal and colloquial. Nirala writes in contradictory moods, now passionately engrossed in sunsets and village life and next enraged at his own insipid singing and failures. Boils and blisters nudge buds and blossoms in his lines. In "Blood Holi," the stench of blood after a student demonstration mingles with "the scent of jackfruit in the air." He ties himself into knots of despair and self-mockery, finding in "I'm Alone" that there was no boat by which he might escape his life. In his elegy to his daughter, "Remembering Saroj," and in many later poems, Nirala blamed himself as a worthless father and a flawed poet; he lived in poverty and was thought mad.

The poet recovers at times and advises himself:

> Hold together like the bubble,
> let go like the rose.

And there remains a timeless oriental mysticism expressed in his love of nature. One untitled lyric begins:

> The cuckoo speaks in every grove,
> his notes shot through with rapture,

and concludes:

> Filled with drunken music sweetly humming
> the bud sways with the bee.

Nirala once complained about the influence T. S. Eliot's impersonal poetry had on his Indian imitators. By being fully what he was, Nirala makes readers aware of his world, the skies, trees, animals, friends, and kin. He knew the poet's only prayable prayer and he made it his own: "Let my life put out / only its own fruit." I hope poetry readers discover this book and that more of Nirala will be translated.

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RONALD VARNEY

The New World

WRITING A LETTER IN 1503 TO HIS SPONSOR, the King of Portugal, Amerigo Vespucci described what he had seen on his latest exploration of the New World. The land was pleasing and fertile: there were stunning mountain ranges and mighty rivers; the forests stood lush and well-nigh impenetrable, teeming with all sorts of wild animals; the fruits tasted delectable and were probably good for the health; gold was abundant; in the sky at night one could see white rainbows, shimmery vapors, flashing meteors. But it was the natives who proved most astonishing—they were gentle and comely, walked about naked, and practiced the most shameful and perverse customs. The men, for example, bored holes in their lips, cheeks, ears, and noses, filling them with bits of marble, pieces of bone, and crystals of alabaster. The women were so lustful that they bit certain poisonous animals in order to "cause the private parts of their husbands to swell up to such a huge size that they appear deformed and disgusting." Vespucci observed soberly, "In that hemisphere I saw things incompatible with the opinions of philosophers."

It is remarkable to what extent legend and fantasy color our knowledge of Latin America, especially its literature. Despite recent groundswells of promotion, a flurry of new translations, and a steadily growing reputation abroad, the writing of Latin America remains slightly blurred, remote, exotic. Now, however, an anthology has appeared that aims to provide English-speaking readers with a comprehensive survey of Latin American literature from the days of Columbus to the present.[1] As the editor explains, "A new perspective on Latin American letters has been attempted in this book: a perspective which presents New World writing as a permanent quest for a literature of the future, a literary utopia in which an integrated image of a whole continent will be at long last possible." The sampling is one of poems, short stories, novel excerpts, and historical documents (most of these from the Colonial period) such as personal memoirs, confidential reports, letters, and erudite treatises. Plays and essays have been excluded. The two volumes complement each other superbly: the second, which focuses on the literature of the twentieth century, may prove the more lively and accessible work, particularly for those who wish to know what they should read after *The Autumn of the Patriarch*; the first, however, containing the earliest writings in the literature and mapping the progress to the twentieth century, seems the more important work, providing the background necessary to understand current developments.

Latin American literature was born in captivity, at a time when "everything was magic." Its first writers were explorers and soldiers like Colum-

[1] THE BORZOI ANTHOLOGY OF LATIN AMERICAN LITERATURE, selected, ed. and introduced by *Emir Rodríguez Monegal* with the assistance of *Thomas Colchie*. Knopf. Two vols; $7.95 each.

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bus, Vespucci, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, men of modest literary conceit intent on recording local myths, impressions of the land, the horrors of the conquest, the search for El Dorado. The first native-born writers, who began publishing their work late in the sixteenth century, explored a wider range of themes and wrote with a greater sense of narrative ingenuity.

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, born in 1539, the bastard son of a conquistador and an Indian princess, retraced the history of his people in *The Royal Commentaries of the Inca*. His uncle related to him the deeds of their first Inca king, Manco Cápac, and added that "in order to spare your tears, I have not recited this story with tears of blood flowing from my eyes as they flow from my heart from the grief I feel at seeing the line of our Incas ended and our empire lost." Juan de Meléndez, a seventeeth-century Peruvian friar, composed a life of Saint Rose of Lima, the first saint born in the New World, who, in her youth, made a crown of tin interlaced with string so that she could tie a crown of nails around her head, hiding it beneath her wimple. "She put it on, the nails pierced her temples, and it pleased her so much that she never took it off—if not this same one, another like it—from the day she put it on until she died." José Gumilla, a seventeenth-century Colombian priest who had spent thirty-five years in "the green hell" of the Orinoco jungles, wrote how the Indians made the fatal poison curare, using the old women of the village, otherwise considered useless, to stir the great boiling vats until they dropped dead from the effects of the fumes.

When independence came to Latin America in the early nineteenth century, the cultural unity of the Colonial period was quickly destroyed by political wars throughout the continent. The romanticism of the time was best defined, perhaps, in the "Ode to the Agriculture of the Torrid Zone," written by the Venezuelan poet and diplomat Andrés Bello. He had been posted abroad in 1810 as Simón Bolívar's secretary, and stayed in England for another two decades. One day in the 1820's he was walking along the London docks as goods from the tropics were being off-loaded; he inhaled the fragrances from home and felt inspired:

> Hail, fecund zone,
> that dost circumscribe the enamored sun's
> vague course and dost conceive every being
> that stirs in every varied clime
> caressèd by its light!

Poetic euphoria, however, was not universal. Fiction had been banned throughout the long Colonial period, and a school of social realism now emerged which could be symbolized by the story, "The Slaughterhouse," written by Esteban Echeverría of Argentina. Set during the dictatorship of wealthy landowner Juan Manuel de Rosa, it describes an incident at a filthy, cave-like place where "huddled together in a long line, four hundred black women unwound heaps of intestines in their laps, picking off one by one those bits of fat which the butcher's avaricious knife had overlooked." Suddenly there is a commotion; a bull gets loose and is

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chased by a hungry mob until struck down, skinned and quartered. An elegant young man, a Unitarian, passes by and is surrounded by the mob, threatened, seized, stripped, and hung upside down like a side of beef. He struggles until he spouts blood and dies. While the tone is blunt and the action clumsy, the message is clear: "The Federalists had brought to an end one of their innumerable feats of valor."

The first great modernist in the literature was Rubén Darío, the Nicaraguan poet. He is said to have complained in his youth that the only subjects of poetic inspiration in Latin America were political events and tropical nature; and in one of his early volumes he argued for a kind of "useless" poetry, one that was refined, precious, clever, evasive, unconcerned with the crude realities of the continent. His spiritual and intellectual home was Paris, his master Verlaine. A whole generation of Latin American poets were to follow his artistic lead, traveling in waves to Paris, finding, through the medium of French poetry, new rhythms, voices, and textures for their own writings. In the life and work of Rubén Darío is revealed a struggle—a common one in Latin American literature—between cosmopolitanism and Americanism; between the cultural and the colloquial uses of language.

In "Symphony in Gray Major," for example, the effect is one of purity and restraint:

> Opaque round window, the sun
> at a sick pace totters to the zenith;
> a sea wind stretches
> in shade, pillowed on its black
> trumpet.

While in "To Roosevelt," provoked by Teddy Roosevelt's order to invade Panama in 1903, the tone is Whitmanesque:

> —our America,
> trembling with hurricanes, trembling with Love:
> O men with Saxon eyes and barbarous souls,
> Our America lives. And dreams. And loves.
> And it is the daughter of the Sun. Be careful.
> Long live Spanish America!

Because of his impact on the language, Darío is a major turning point in the literature. "Any poem written in Spanish," said one of his critics, "can be dated before or after him."

"For too long," begins the preface to volume two, "Latin Americans suffered from a feeling of having come too late to the world's banquet-table—from an ingrained conviction that everything had been said or done, that there was nothing new to invent, no new books to write. Their fate, or so it seemed, was always to repeat what had already been done better in Europe or the United States." This dismal self-regard, however, began vanishing so dramatically in this century that, in the 1950's, Octavio

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Paz could confidently announce that "for the first time in our history, we are contemporaries of all mankind."

What had brought this about? Who had come upon the scene?

For one, Borges. His poetry and fiction came to embody the most complex and inventive strains of narration in the language. He was a scholar and a fantasist, with a mind of astonishing concepts and peripheral visions. There was also Neruda, who, despite his politics (and we may forgive him, in part, by recognizing that politics and diplomacy have long been honorable avocations for Latin American poets) was to be justly reckoned the most lyrical verse-writer in the literature. Carlos Drummond de Andrade, lesser known and writing in Portuguese, could be cited as another master, one who had greatly influenced younger writers. And Octavio Paz. A remarkably gifted poet, he became one of the most perceptive and influential of all Latin American essayists, a fluent spokesman for many voices. In *Children of the Mire* (The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures, 1971–1972) he would give a poignant summing up: "Between Cosmopolitanism and Americanism, my generation made a clean and permanent break: we are condemned to be American as our fathers and grandfathers were condemned to seek America or flee from her. Our leap has been within ourselves."

In this century fiction has replaced poetry as the dominant form in Latin American literature, gaining for it a global reputation. The landmarks begin appearing in 1941 with the publication of Borges' *The Garden of Forking Paths*. In succession came the novel *A Plan for Escape* (1945) by Borges' countryman and collaborator, Adolfo Bioy Casares; the novels *El Señor Presidente* (1946) and *Men of Maize* (1949) by Miguel Angel Asturias of Guatemala; *The Kingdom of This World* (1949) by Alejo Carpentier of Cuba; *The Short Life* (1950) by Juan Carlos Onetti of Uruguay; *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* (1956) by Guimarães Rosa of Brazil; and *On Heroes and Tombs* by Ernesto Sábato of Argentina.

The most recent group of writers appeared in the sixties, a group whose purpose has been to make language itself the narrative focus of their work. To them formal distinctions between prose and poetry are unimportant. Cuba seems to hold preeminence here, producing some of the most daring and experimental fiction today in all of Latin America. "The Entry of Christ into Havana," a selection from Severo Sarduy's novel *From Cuba with a Song*, provides graphic illustration of the so-called novel about language:

> What a reception in Havana! They were all waiting for Him. His picture was everywhere, endlessly repeated, to the point of ridicule or simply boredom: pasted up, ripped off, pulled apart, nailed on every door, pasted around every pole, decorated with mustaches, with pricks dripping into His mouth, even in colors—oh so blond and beautiful, just like Greta Garbo—not to mention the stained-glass reproductions in the Galiano subway. Wherever you look, He looks back.
>
> Bruno: I'm gonna walk no more: I'm sitting right down. I'm at my wits' end: They take more pictures of him than of the Coca-Cola bottle!

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Let somebody else carry Him. Here's where I'm staying.

And there he stayed, in a fit of hiccups.

Pictures, taken from above, but at different distances: a black spot, a winding line of the highway, tilled fields; a blond head, toes on a platform, a background of pavement, white locks, and up front His profile; close-up: His eyes. His eyes; white locks, profile; dark spot, highway.

Generalizations do not come easily to this literature. One aspect, though, seems worth mentioning; it holds true from the days of Columbus to those of Sarduy. Latin American literature is intensely masculine, both in tone and tradition. Seldom is a woman portrayed as anything more than a cipher in works coming before the twentieth century; and after that only rarely is she found struggling toward anything like a state of consciousness. As for major women writers in the entire literary history, they seem to number three: the mysterious poet Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–1695); Gabriela Mistral; and Clarice Lispector, the Brazilian novelist.

Boom is a vulgar though appropriate word for describing the current state of affairs in Latin American literature. A recent article[2] by the editor of this anthology eloquently states the case for ignoring publicity agencies and listening closer to the work itself, reading and rereading it, taking distance, balancing things out. "Only then," he concludes, "will we be able to decide if the sound and fury of the boom have left something more than a sensation of emptiness. Only then will we be able to rescue the literature of an entire continent from the irresponsible hands of propaganda, be it commercial, professional, or (as it is now fashionable to claim) 'ideological.' Let us begin the urgent task."

And so he does with this anthology. It is an impressive work of scholarship, although on occasion it swaddles the subject so affectionately in lit. crit. as to cut off the supply of air. For the great majority of his entries in both volumes the editor is descriptive and unbiased; but for a chosen few writers, especially those with big (or forgotten) reputations, he feels the need to be judgmental; to reassess reputations.

Speaking about the novels and short stories of Asturias, he comments: "All these works were highly celebrated by the Latin American intelligentsia, who proclaimed Asturias a model and mentor. Less celebrated was his willingness to represent his country in 1966 as ambassador to Paris, at a time when the government was crushing revolutionary guerrillas with U. S. assistance." Of García Márquez: "A formidable achievement from the stylistic point of view, *The Autumn of the Patriarch* becomes tedious and, despite some brilliant episodes, fails to hold the reader's interest. Obviously, García Márquez has reached a point in his career at which he has to rethink very carefully his future course." Of Gabriela Mistral: "Her poetry was sometimes harsh and prosaic; her verses had an obsessive beat. But in her best volumes (*The Felling of Trees,*

[2] Emir Rodríguez Monegal, "The New Latin American Novelists," *Partisan Review*, I (1977), pp. 40–51.

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1938; *Wine Press*, 1954) she achieved a sort of stark and uncompromising beauty that came very close to justifying the 1945 Nobel Prize she received at a time when Reyes, Neruda, and Borges were all still very active." And of Juan Carlos Onetti: "He lived for nearly fifteen years in Latin America's most important literary center as if under a curse of invisibility. His books failed to attract notice; in competitions, he always got second prize or perhaps honorable mention, never top honors . . . The story ["Jacob and the Other"] was presented to the important international competition organized in 1960 by *Life*. True to form, it won only an honorable mention from the Latin American jury—hardly very rewarding for a writer of fifty-one. Like his protagonists, it would seem, Onetti is a *pharmakos*."

Such assessments are not necessarily false, but they are gratuitous, and have little place in a book of this kind. The whole point of an anthology is to provide a starting point for further discovery. The reader resents being told what is sacred and what is mundane in the writing. The main audience for the *Borzoi Anthology of Latin American Literature* may well be the classroom—which is all the more reason to avoid force-feeding opinions.

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FRANCIS FLAHERTY

Schumacher's Guide

UNTIL HIS DEATH IN SWITZERLAND LAST AUTUMN, E. F. Schumacher, Rhodes Scholar in economics and for twenty years Economics Advisor to the British National Coal Board, was one of the handful of economists openly critical of the crude materialism and simplistic psychology on which their discipline rests. He achieved international fame four years ago for his *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered,* a collection of essays whose common theme is the plea for a saner economic policy than one which measures human happiness as the number of jelly donuts consumed per capita per year. The essays are diverse, treating such disparate topics as the awful dangers of nuclear energy, the idolatry of giantism, Buddhist economics (a favorite text of California Governor Jerry Brown), and unemployment in India. But the basic contention of that book is clear: modern economics has become so myopic that it can neither discern the dire poverty of two-thirds of mankind nor foresee the imminent depletion of the earth's resources.

By the time of his death, Schumacher had emerged as a major spokesman for ecologists, altruists, and all sensible people who realize that "permanent, limitless expansion in a finite environment" is, eventually, disastrous. Schumacher's vision of doom is persuasive because he was not a visionary. Director of an organic farming association, leading Third World consultant, and key figure in the decentralization of the British coal industry, Schumacher was hardly an academic economist. He developed and applied and stumped for the concept of "appropriate technology" for underdeveloped nations; he was a prime mover behind the Scott-Bader Company, a worker-owned British chemical firm whose constitution provides that half the company's appropriated profits be donated to charity, that the salaries of the lowest and highest paid employees not exceed a one to seven ratio, and that no products be sold for war-related purposes. In his work and in his writing, Schumacher is squarely in the tradition of Aldo Leopold, John Kenneth Galbraith and Buckminster Fuller, a maverick tradition which stresses the maximization of human happiness with a minimum of consumption, rather than the reverse state of affairs which classical economics has foisted upon us.

A Guide for the Perplexed, however, is theistic, abstract, and refractory of classification.[1] From the time of Descartes, Schumacher claims, Western man has neglected his inner life, embraced materialism, and searched for the answers to spiritual questions in the formulae of science. The methods of science, in the phrase of Karl Stern, have become the "mentality" of society. When confined to the laboratory the scientific method insures the validity of results, but when applied to the social sciences or to philosophy it is an inappropriate tool, a slide rule used to measure the dimensions of God.

[1] A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED, by *E. F. Schumacher.* Harper & Row. $8.95.

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Schumacher, who practiced Buddhism, argues that there are inner experiences that are quintessentially human and that are knowable solely through meditation or prayer or other spiritual exercise. Before Descartes, this spiritual quest was the greatest of human traditions. Schumacher cites scores of notables from all ages and both hemispheres; Aquinas, Paracelsus, Dante, Gandhi, Coomaraswamy and others attest to the timeless validity of the adage, "Know thyself." In dispensing with any endeavor not subject to empirical tests, Descartes bequeathed to modern man a surfeit of knowledge and a scarcity of wisdom.

From that bleak legacy, the reader can infer, arises the modern passion for possessions, the anomie of our societies, and the vapidity of much of our lives. Schumacher is an advocate of religion in its broadest sense: the belief that there is something out there (and within every human) which cannot be explained but must be experienced. Only by reviving his lost traditions can modern man solve his social ills and salve his existential wounds.

A Guide for the Perplexed has very good ideas very badly phrased. It is scattershot, full of curt dismissals of reputable disciplines, and somewhat random in its organization. A dyed-in-the-wool Cartesian will dismiss it for its inscrutable Buddhist style ("the Great Chain of Being," "the Four Fields of Knowledge"), and the sympathetic reader will not quite know what he is agreeing with. But it is true that twentieth-century men place no great premium on inner development, and it does seem unusual that the dictum "Know thyself," so valuable to our ancestors, has no currency for us because it is not susceptible to scientific articulation. Twentieth-century thinking assumes that people are interchangeable units with certain physical needs and predictable patterns of behavior—but, if there is anything that each individual knows, it is that he is unique, that his most important needs transcend the physical, and that his behavior is no more than the denouement of the teeming, energetic story of his inner life.

If twentieth-century thinking can come up with no better vision of man than that, we had better not rely on it too heavily. And time is short: "We are now far too clever to survive without wisdom," says Schumacher in his gentle but urgent way. There is probably not a thinking man or woman who has not devoutly wished that the world's destructive nuclear capability could be controlled by those for whom wisdom and inner development were the goals of life.

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GUY DAVENPORT

Post-Modern and After

JUST LAST WEEK I LEARNED FROM THE GRAPEVINE that we are soon to have a novel from Carl Andre, who gave up requiring an *accent aigu* for his surname years ago. Andre was most recently in the news for distributing boulders in a Hartford park and calling the arrangement sculpture, an event that pierced the triple tungsten of *The New Yorker*'s fastidious exclusiveness and the Connecticut treasury to the tune of eighty-seven thousand dollars. Before that, he shook up the British with a line of bricks along the floor of the Tate: another sculpture, unnervingly called *Lever*. He is a poet, a novelist, and, before his career in the fine arts, a line-brakeman on the Pennsylvania Railroad. He is the Andy Warhol of art.

Lord knows what the novel will be like. The information I picked up from the grapevine is that the subject is Eadweard Muybridge's murder of his wife's lover, Harry Larkyns. There is a folklore version of the matter in which Muybridge freely admits his guilt before the San Francisco judge (one imagines a jawful of tobacco, a string tie, watery blue eyes behind mail-order pince-nez specs, a lethal gavel). The entire trial then consists of the judge's saying, "Well now, Mr. Muybridge, I do believe the jury would all like to shake your hand."

The history of the murder is quite otherwise. Muybridge's hair turned white before the trial was over. The elements of the story are all good narrative coin: Muybridge the analyst of motion, the pioneer cinema technician, explorer of the northwest and of Central America, the inspirer of Remington, Degas, Eakins, and Meissonier. There is no way under the sun to anticipate what Carl Andre will do with Muybridge. He may print newspaper accounts of the trial verbatim, he may print Muybridge photographs, he may print blank pages riddled by bullet holes. That is, he will invent a form, one we can't expect. Picasso never drew a telephone, but we can nevertheless see a telephone by Picasso; nor did he ever depict an automobile, airplane, TV set, radio, or typewriter, things he saw far more often than guitars and fruit compotes on tables. Style plays high-handedly with things in our century, perhaps because things began to play high-handedly with us as the First Machine Age evolved into the Second. Things that seem to have a life of their own, such as machines and works of art, enter into the present crisis of the arts as problems quite different from those of the animals and angels they replace.

And the arts themselves became problematical by sharing the idea of progress, or, more accurately, trying to share the idea of progress. It is purest illusion that the arts can participate in a technological evolution, or that their history moves from primitive to civilized, like the kettle growing up to be a steam locomotive. And yet we persist in criticizing, measuring, weighing works of art in terms of modernity, advancement, obsolescence. So much so, in fact, that whole areas of the arts have become simply an

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agon in which the prize goes to the artist thought to be foremost in the game. Whatever Carl Andre is—a man rich in wit, an accomplished ironist, a talented showman—he gets our attention principally by pulling out ahead in a race that has as much to do with art as bull-baiting had to do with Shakespeare.

So the critic Jerome Klinkowitz, a specialist in front-line reporting in artistic revolutions (his terminology) gives us the battle positions of a dozen modernists in the thick of the fray.[1] Printed in blinding Telephone Book *sans serif,* with the lines twice as long as the one you are now reading (so that losing one's place at line's end adds to the frustration of paying attention to a text that has the organization of a vaudevillian's scrapbook of notices and billings). Were it not for Roy Behrens' splendid *collages* (*scuola di* Max Ernst and worthy of that master), one would zing the book across the room as an impertinence, the equivalent of a mumbling lecturer who is having rough going with his notes.

A prologue clears the terrain: we are to move outside The Post-Modern Avant-Garde. In eighteen square inches of typespace we are shot past the Neoclassic, Romantic, Victorian, and Modern periods, and are located at a crossroads. If we are interested in The Modern ("Pound, Eliot, and Joyce"), we are directed to study the critical works of Hugh Kenner; if in "Beckett and the Post-Moderns," Ihab Hassan. (Confusing directions, as Kenner is our best explicator of both Beckett and, in *The Counterfeiters,* of post-modern concerns.)

"Then," asks Prof. Klinkowitz, "what are we to do with the writers who are as distant from Beckett as Beckett is from Joyce?" These advance scouts are at outposts which (we are told) we can point to on the map of the battlefield. Here and here and here, for example, are Barth, Pynchon, Hawkes, and Nabokov. And way over here are loyalists who carry the flag of another faction: William Carlos Williams, Kenneth Patchen, La Nin, Douglas Woolf, Paul Metcalf, and Gil Orlovitz. "But there is a style of fiction very much above ground which defies the Post-Modernist label." These fall into men of rank: Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. ("demonstrating the arbitrary nature of reality, and allowing a graceful way of living within it"), Donald Barthelme ("fun and play with his materials, the advantage not seized by the French New Novelists; constructions made of the rejected and discarded elements of our culture, in a way that makes us less alienated from them"), Ishmael Reed ("the Neo Hoo Doo aesthetic as the native American counterpart to the new Superfiction; conjurism as a mode of new fiction"), and Hunter S. Thompson ("the self at the center of experience . . . his own personal reality as a myth"). And coming to their relief on the barricades: Ronald Sukenick ("an imaginative response to the world"), Gilbert Sorrentino ("an emphasis upon the sentences as he writes them, not upon the projected and dramatized action of his narrative"), Michael Stephens ("pure lyricism as fiction"), Clarence Major ("the vitality of self-creation through the artist's language"), Walter

[1] THE LIFE OF FICTION, by *Jerome Klinkowitz,* with graphics by *Roy R. Behrens.* University of Illinois Press. $10.00.

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MICHIGAN QUARTERLY REVIEW

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THE *MICHIGAN QUARTERLY REVIEW* ANNOUNCES
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Abish ("language as its own subject"), Russell Banks ("a playful disruption of content, to make the reader astonished by a world otherwise taken for granted"), Steve Katz ("improvization, like a jazz musician"), and Jonathan Baumbach ("exploitation of literary conventions as conventions, in order to revitalize literary form").

Years ago T. S. Eliot made a succinct clarification of what's happening when a literary revolution occurs. Young writers learn their art from immediate models, aping both style and emotional response, without noticing that history has lurched forward, shifting the fitness of stimulus and response. Homer invoked a goddess to inspire him because he and his audience accepted the reality of that goddess as undoubtingly as they accepted the lyre they heard and the cushioned chair from which the bard, possessed and in a rapture, chanted his mighty lines. When Vergil invoked a goddess he was playing a charming game of allusion and cultural nostalgia. When Pope invoked the muse, he was making an elegant joke.

Every generation of writers has to readjust its heritage to its own sensibilities and the new world around its ears. A buzz of admonition and theory tells us very little about these twelve writers, whom you will have to appreciate as best you can, according to your talents, away from Prof. Klinkowitz's fanfares. I have doubts about Vonnegut's ability to last. Barthelme is the one solid, bright figure in the lot. Abish is dull, and too many of the others, Katz especially, lack essential skills in shaping language, so that their liveliness seems forced and programmatical. If, indeed, this is the revolution in narrative that it claims to be, it is a pedantic, self-conscious, self-congratulatory revolution, with every symptom of having come out of a textbook rather than, as my freshmen say, out of "real life."

The term "Post-Modern" is curiously *ad hoc*, as if a line had to be drawn somewhere, no matter how arbitrary. The line was drawn with increasing futility for some years; modernity refused to be outdated. James Thrall Soby wrote a book called *After Picasso* in 1935; Picasso outlived ten of the fourteen artists therein studied, and outpainted them all. As early as the 20's Pound was rallying the troops to see what narrative prose would look like after *Ulysses*.

Robert Martin Adams has written an astute assessment of Joyce's influence and heritage.[2] In a terse preface he summarizes his always sensible, always balanced view of Joyce (as in his immensely interesting study of *Ulysses, Surface and Symbol*), and then proceeds to offer essays on a round of writers more or less with a foot in the Joycean universe. The studies of Nabokov, Carlo Emilio Gadda, and Borges are the most original, though there are some very interesting remarks about Eliot and the Joycean imprint on "The Waste Land." This is a good, meaty book: to be read. I question, however, the relevance of mentioning Joyce at all when looking at Beckett. It is true that Beckett began to write under the spell and shadow of his fellow Dubliner, and followed his career with attention,

[2] AFTERJOYCE: STUDIES IN FICTION AFTER ULYSSES, by *Robert Martin Adams*. Oxford University Press. $10.00.

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but his own work is nowhere like Joyce. Beckett's tone is wholly different, as are his concerns, his methods, his idea of humanity. On the other hand, I would like for Prof. Adams to have noticed that the only real heir to Joyce's images in multiple plies, staging scrupulously rendered realistic scenes transparently over ancient paradigms, is Eudora Welty, our greatest living master of prose in the United States.

Prof. Adams' discussion of Joycean criticism (which has become as diligent as Biblical scholarship in the last century) is sharp in insight and starts many's the hare for somebody to chase. One clear, splendidly true sentence—"His mind was obsessed with structures, and he discovered, imagined, or created systems of correspondence, not only through his books, but also, to less happy effect, throughout his life"—Professor Ellmann ought to be made to copy on a blackboard one hundred times.

Not that he doesn't know how true the sentence is; he doesn't appreciate it, doesn't, somewhere deep in the reservations of his heart, quite believe it. Ellmann has now, after his big biography, given us two studies of *Ulysses: Ulysses on the Liffey* (in which he "traced the intricacies of the intellectual patterning" of the novel, as he says) and *The Consciousness of Joyce,* which gives a catalogue (39 pages long) of Joyce's working library in 1920, and makes some thousand remarks on how Joyce used and connected up elements from his vast reading. As in Adams, the hares start every quarter page, but are never to be seen again. If ever a book needed to be kept on the desk and completed, this is it. I detect a bit of rushing into print in the very title, which makes no sense but is very much of the moment. "Consciousness" is right now a nonce word among students and the unsceptical who have fallen into the hands of Himalayan *illuminati,* saffron-robed opsimathy, and other spangers of the mind.

It is like watching a man at the end of the rainbow walk round and round the pot of gold, getting warmer and warmer, and then walking away none the wiser. He talks about O'Flaherty's *Ogygia* and doesn't notice that, among other things, it accounts for the number of chapters in *Ulysses.* He chats about Plutarch's dialogue on the E at Delphi, notices the use Joyce made of it on the first page of the *Wake,* and drops the matter with a clunk. I don't want to undervalue this book. It is an informative one, and essential to any library of Joyceana. But it does not live up to the high standard of Joyce scholarship, and it peters out dreadfully at the end, musing idly on what Joyce's politics might have been.[3]

C. H. Peake takes Harry Levin's perception that "Joyce's books, like Thomas Mann's, fit into the broadening dialectical pattern of *Künstler* versus *Bürger,*" as a subject to anatomize in some detail.[4] He goes far beyond it, however, and gives us one of the best studies we have of the *oeuvre,* including a judicious and cautious approach to the *Wake.* His close readings of *Dubliners,* the *Portrait,* and *Ulysses* rehearse and incorporate the most cogent previous criticism, and offer a sensitive, thoroughly respon-

[3] THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF JOYCE, by *Richard Ellmann.* Oxford University Press. $10.95.

[4] JAMES JOYCE: THE CITIZEN AND THE ARTIST, by *C. H. Peake.* Stanford University Press. $16.95.

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sible, wise interpretation. It is the one study I would want to assign a student if he had time but for the one comprehensive book about Joyce, and I would place it alongside Hugh Kenner's brilliant *Dublin's Joyce* for the clarity of its understanding and the skill with which it draws together all of Joyce into the unity of vision Joyce seems to have intended. Although he disclaims attention to the more intricate symbolism, he nevertheless is more successful than anybody else in playing light over Joyce's strange ligatures of meaning and systems of symbols.

The next great breakthrough in Joycean scholarship will have to be a unified field theory of the symbolism. Many critics have approached one, and practically every carefully detailed study of a theme (Roland McHugh's of the superalphabetical signs in the *Wake,* for instance, or Michael Seidel's of how Joyce folded Mediterranean over Irish geography for *Ulysses,* or such a brilliant exploration as Marion Cumpiano's of the salmon in the *Wake*[5]) assumes a Joycean symbolism of awesome symmetry. Prof. Adams' simple statement that Joyce's mind was obsessed with structures and that it sought out or created systems of correspondences will, I suspect, be the beginning and end of the matter when we find a unified theory. Symbolism is just now undergoing a lively re-inspection by the anthropologists (Sperber, Turner, Needham, Douglas, and many another) more or less in conjunction with Lévi-Strauss's bewildering study of myth. What's interesting here is that Lévi-Strauss seems to be explaining a process that Joyce took for granted in all of his writing, namely that imagery of all sorts becomes symbolic by being a member of a family of images. The totemistic systems of the primitive mind hang together in a wonderfully crazy and poetical way that turns out to make a kind of sense. A kind of sense: there's one clue to Joyce's maze. For Joyce was determined to make his books of that cultural midden of substructure that underlies our public life and knits us together as a people. He was aware that Freud saw his way into a similar system, and that anthropology was beginning to demonstrate a universality among peoples in which we could recognize ourselves in societies radically different and at the same time see much of what we call civilization in archaic cultures. This is well known, of course, but what hasn't been generally grasped by critics of Joyce is precisely his constant awareness of symbols as primarily a series like a grammatical unit, a species all the members of which must be known, even though it is practically a definition of the mind to say that these families of symbols are so deeply tacit, so integrally disguised, so *subsconscious* (if we can hear that word any more), and so vital to our sanity and harmony of behavior that we are touched to the quick by being made conscious of them.

A symbol has no meaning; it has articulateness. As the European mind went through the astounding metamorphosis of the Renaissance (which did not revive the Classical world, but buried it forever), scientific ration-

[5] THE SIGLA OF FINNEGANS WAKE, by *Roland McHugh.* University of Texas Press. $15.00. EPIC GEOGRAPHY: JAMES JOYCE'S ULYSSES, by *Michael Seidel.* Princeton University Press. $15.00. Marion W. Cumpiano, "The Salmon and Its Leap in *Finnegans Wake*," *James Joyce Quarterly,* Vol. XIV, No. 3.

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The Georgia Review

Spring 1978

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ality swallowed—and is still digesting—several tacit understandings of the world. A new *totem* introduced itself, a new way of being kin to each other and to the world (this is one of the things *Finnegans Wake* is about): a Viconian end (and embryonic rebeginning) of an era.

Two men, both associated obliquely with the new scientific age, had already perceived that no matter what mask the world wears, its mind still feeds from archaic roots and keeps its totemistic structure: Charles Fourier and Emanuel Swedenborg. Both could have talked easily with Lévi-Strauss's Brazilian Indians; they thought the same way. Fourier (echoes of whom are everywhere, in Marx, in Bloom) understood all kinship (of meaning, of people, of everything in the universe) to be a comprehensive harmony of *gammes,* or musical chords, or totemistic series, the discovery of which would be an occasion for man to organize himself into the society implicit (hitherto thwarted) in human nature. Swedenborg sought a similar harmony, had similar systems of correspondences, and a similar renovation of society.

These systems of corresponding symbols, always in grammatical series, constitute a madcap tradition of gibberish except where they have energized the imagination of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Joyce, Melville and Lenin, Blake and Emerson. I suspect that the theory, when we see it, of Joyce's symbols, will have to be explained in terms of disciplines now being used to demonstrate what honey has to do with tobacco, how we name animals, what history is, and why the moon is chaste.

Meanwhile, we still struggle with acts of mimesis as if they were events rather than parallels to events, forgetting that they are infinitely more intelligible than reality because they were made to be. Morroe Berger[6] sustains a discussion of the novel and sociology for 258 pages with sentences like "In *Moby Dick* Melville devoted a chapter to cetology, perhaps to make his novel about whaling more authentic," and "In *Doctor Faustus* Mann discussed fine points of musical theory and history based on his reading and consultation of experts on music." No less than five authorities are listed in his notes to witness to the latter observation. A batch of other new books testify to our continuing need to see the novel as a force that belongs demonstrably to the dynamism of things.[7] The late Prof. Heiserman's study of Greek and Latin prose narratives up to the third century of our era is a wonderfully readable book. It looks at the novel when it is still young and spritely in western culture and applies in its scrutiny most of the analytical tools we bring to more sophisticated forms. The results are revealing, informative, and useful. We keep running across

[6] REAL AND IMAGINED WORLDS: THE NOVEL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE, by *Morroe Berger*. Harvard University Press. $15.00.

[7] THE NOVEL BEFORE THE NOVEL: Essays and Discussions about the Beginnings of Prose Fiction in the West, by *Arthur Heiserman*. University of Chicago Press. $15.00. THE OLD AND THE NEW: FROM DON QUIXOTE TO KAFKA, by *Marthe Robert*. University of California Press. $12.50. FOUR POSTWAR AMERICAN NOVELISTS: BELLOW, MAILER, BARTH, AND PYNCHON, by *Frank D. McConnell*. University of Chicago Press. $15.00. THE MYTHOPOEIC REALITY: THE POSTWAR AMERICAN NOVEL, by *Mas'ud Zavarzadeh*. University of Illinois Press. $10.00.

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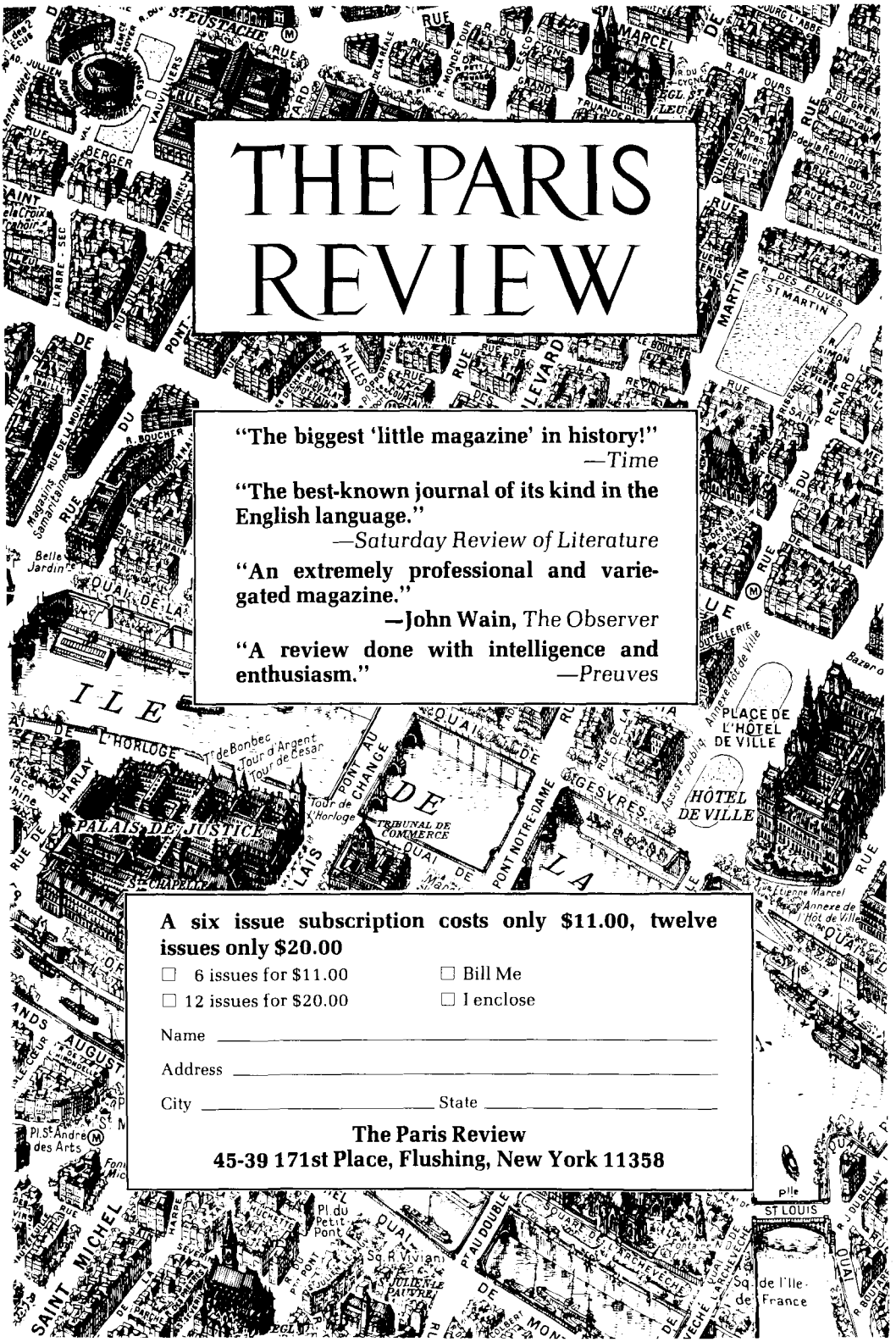
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the paradox that the novel is always itself in the extremist metamorphoses, and when put to use (as the Greek erotic novel by Christian romancers) for practically any purpose. It has laws native to itself, and displays a versatility of expression and effect that has kept it alive, congenial, and healthy for two millennia.

Robert in her study of Cervantes and Kafka shows (where her straining at consonances that must remain dubious doesn't tax our following her argument) the persistence of a theme that provides the very bone and gristle of modern writing. Prof. Adams in his *AfterJoyce* considers in his closing pages whether the modern period should be designated (as by Hugh Kenner) The Pound Era, or, as he favors, The Joyce Era, or, as posterity might fancy, The Kafka Era or The Picasso Era.

Kafka is the interesting designation: how did he get in the running at all? He (like Van Gogh among the Post Impressionists) was a dark horse indeed. It may be, as Robert says, that he closes in a symmetry of symbols the moment of Cervantes, that inexplicable moment when for the first time psychology appeared full-grown in fiction and the world became an extension of the imagination rather than the other way round. *Hamlet* was a rhyming event the same year as the *Quixote*: and thereafter the melancholy question of whether thinking makes a thing so was in the world. The *imagined* took precedence over the *perceived*. This theme is everywhere; but only in Kafka did it appear so stark and so accusing.

The studies of writers in the midst of rich careers by McConnell and Zavarzadeh are both rigorous and informative. Prof. Zavarzadeh sees the non-fiction novel, so-called, as "a new distribution of narrative energy" and brings a great weight of scholarship to his work. He is a critic of vast talents and awesome powers of taxonomy that take him far beyond texts that a more conservative spectator would consider prose or narrative or literature at all. But these matters are in the air, well up in it at that, and need all the explanation we can come by.

Prof. McConnell works with a surer and smaller collection of writers, two of whom are, as I suppose we must say, modern (Bellow and Mailer), and two post-modern (Barth and Pynchon). We get close readings of all four. Bellow's warm humanism and Mailer's turbulence are fairly well understood by this time. Barth and Pynchon remain enigmas, something new and disturbing. McConnell makes a great deal of them both and leaves us feeling less lost and less in the dark when faced with such unbalancing novelists.

Not since the first two decades of the century has there been such a sense of crisis in imaginative writing. And not only there: the same crisis extends to poetry, music, and the visual arts. Modernism has by now shown that it is many currents and perhaps not all in the same river. There is a feeling that the grand moment of modernism is over, the deaths of Pound and Picasso in the second half of the century, and of Kafka and Joyce in the first half, being markers of boundaries. We are now, in the midst of a fruitful retrospection, wondering which way to turn, what to carry forward, what to abandon.

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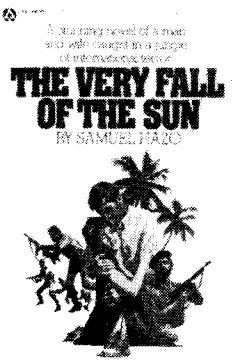

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